

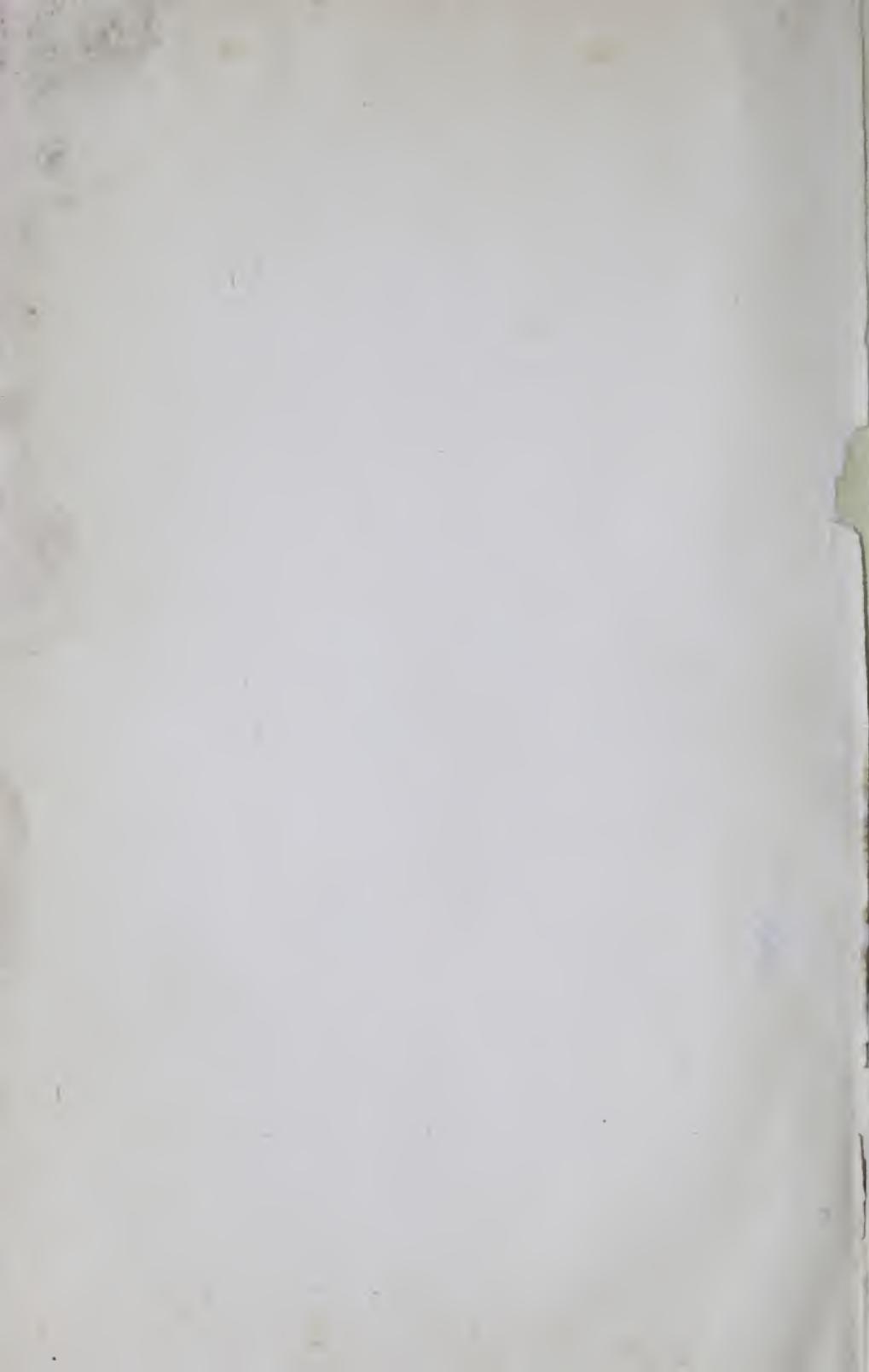
THE HISTORY
OF CONFESION



RT. REV. L. DE GOESBRIAND, D.D.







SJ
By Maria
Mrs. W. M. Fullam.



THE

History of Confession;

OR,

THE DOGMA OF CONFESSION

Vindicated from the Attacks of Heretics and Infidels.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

OF

Rev. AMBROISE GUILLOIS.

H

BY

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Translator's Preface.

THIS little work, which we have named the "History of Confession," is substantially the same as the work of Rev. A. Guillois, *The Dogma of Confession Vindicated*. We have named it the "History of Confession," because it is, in reality, a history of confession. Rev. A. Guillois is well-known by other works, especially by his admirable work, *Le Catechisme de Guillois*. This work of his, which we partly reproduce, was written in the form of letters, and addressed to a young lawyer, a friend of his. This young man, after leading for some time a devout life, went to Paris, and, owing to bad associations and bad books, had given up the practice of religion and had become almost an infidel. He wrote and said what so many of us hear continually repeated, that confession is simply a human, not a divine, institution; that there is no use in going to confession; that it is too much to require a man to kneel at the feet of another man, and confess his sins to him; that the priest will probably reveal what he heard in confession, etc., etc.

To the objections of the young lawyer, Father Guillois replied in a series of letters, which originally were not intended for publication.

He begins by demonstrating that confession was always in use, especially among the Jews; that it was in use also amongst the pagans; that it was instituted by Our Saviour; that it has always been practised in the Church, both in the West, and amongst the schismatics

Preface.

of the East. He demonstrates from reason that it was impossible for men to establish confession, and, finally, shows the utility of this divine institution and refutes the objections advanced against it.

We have thought it well to change the form of the French work, and of dividing it into chapters, and not into letters. We have retrenched from the work of Father Guillois many things of a merely personal or local character, which, in our days and country, would be entirely out of place, and have added many remarks of our own to the most important chapter of this work, viz., the third, which treats of the institution of confession by Our Saviour.

The work is small in size, yet it was said of it that "it is one of the most complete and instructive treatises hitherto written about confession." Father Guillois says of it that, "short as it is, it has cost us long and laborious researches. They shall find in it many facts that had not yet been collected together, nay, there are in it facts that had never been published." And again: "They shall find in this volume matter for a course of instructions on confession, and a mass of facts and testimonies, for which you would have to search four or five hundred volumes, many of which have become quite rare." All the facts and testimonies quoted in this work, when taken collectively, are quite decisive in favor of the divine institution of confession. Please, dear reader, examine them with attention, and if, being a Catholic, you have given up the practice of confession, you may be brought to say, with a famous infidel (Bouguer): "I was an infidel, simply because I was a corrupt man....It is my heart, much more than my mind, that has need of being healed."

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I. ANTIQUITY OF CONFESSION.

Original sin. Confession of Adam and Eve. The obligation of the Confession of sin imposed by almighty God on His people. Confession of David. Solemn expiation. Confession made by the high-priest. The practice of Confession always maintained among the Jews. 9

CHAPTER II. CONFESSION FOUND AMONG THE PAGANS.

Expiatory sacrifices. Customs of the Athenians. Luggubrious feasts instituted by Romulus. Mysteries of Ceres. Initiation. Confession practised by Marcus Aurelius. Confessors among the Grecians. Magicians of Elis. Confession of the emperor of China. The Yu-pé. Spiritual Fathers at Thibet. Confession of the Grand Lama of the Talapoins. Of the Siamese. The Gones. Confessors in the kingdom of Persia. Custom and Proverb of the Indians. The Nittia-Carma, or Ritual of the Brahmins. Story of Dranpadi and the five celebrated brothers. Account of Valmiky. Confession of the Japanese. . 24

CHAPTER III. OBLIGATION OF CONFESSION ESTABLISHED BY JESUS CHRIST.

Instances of Confession mentioned in the Gospel. The

establishment of Confession promised. Jesus Christ gives to His apostles and their successors the power of forgiving and of retaining sins. Confession is essentially annexed to the judicial powers given to the apostles. How did the apostles and early Christians understand the words of Christ? . 46

CHAPTER IV. CONFESSION HAS ALWAYS BEEN PRACTISED IN THE CHURCH OF CHRIST.

CHAPTER V. THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF CONFESSION PROVED BY THE COUNCILS OF THE CHURCH, AND BY NUMEROUS FACTS DRAWN FROM THE FIRST AGES.

The Councils upon Confession. Public canons in England under king Edgar. Confession of the religious. Of bishops and priests. Of kings and emperors. Of the military. Confession in times of danger. Before communion. Before confirmation. During Lent and the principal festivals. Confession prepar-

Contents.

5

atory to leading a new life. Before the translation
of relics. At the hour of death and during serious
illness. Before going to punishment. 86

CHAPTER VI. DIVINE INSTITUTION OF CONFESSION PROVED FROM REASON.

It is impossible that man could have invented Confession.
The divine Institution proved from the agreement
which exists on this point between the Oriental and
Occidental Churches. 110

CHAPTER VII. ABOUT PUBLIC CONFESSION AND PEN- ANCE AS PRACTISED IN THE EARLY AGES.

Institution of the penitentiary priest. Nectarius, in
suppressing the office of penitentiary, did not
abolish Confession. The penitentiary was not the
only priest employed in hearing Confessions. Secret
Confession always preceded public Confession.
Secret sins were sometimes confessed publicly.
Bishop Narcissus and his calumniators. Marcus,
the heretic. In whose presence did they make
public confession? Of public and solemn penance.
The *Weepers*, the *Hearers*, the *Standers*. Solemn
penance permitted only once. Divers impositions of
hands. Reconciliation of penitents. . . . 116

CHAPTER VIII. TESTIMONIES OF PROTESTANTS IN FAVOR OF CONFESSION.

Acknowledgment of Gibbon. Leibnitz and Lord Fitz-
william. Louis Bayle. James I. of England.
Luther not opposed to Confession. The Confession

of Augsburg. The abolition of Confession caused innumerable crimes. Remarkable passage in the Swedish Liturgy. The Lutherans of Nuremberg request Charles V. to re-establish by an edict the usage of Confession. The Protestants of Strassburg express the same desire. The Church of England has preserved the use of Confession. Doctor Pusey. Jules Ernest Naville. Conduct of some French Lutheran ministers with regard to penance. . . 135

CHAPTER IX. ABOUT THE USE OF CONFESSION.

What is the use of Confession ? Answer. Confession reconciles the sinner with God and with himself. The happiness it confers. The cavalry officer and Father Brydaine. Confession prevents despair from entering the soul of the guilty. It hinders a multitude of crimes and scandals. Restitution effected by Confession. Incident related by Madame de Genlis. Confession consoles the dying sinner. Confession of Marie Antoinette. 149

CHAPTER X. ANSWER TO AN OBJECTION.

Is it not very hard and humiliating to kneel before a man? History of Naaman, general of the armies of Syria. Confession has nothing hard and humiliating for the sinner. Comparison. What the Indians think of Confession. The king of Congo laments because he cannot go to Confession, and asks for missionaries. Indians of the diocese of Vincennes. An Indian travels over 1800 miles to find a confessor. The confessor is not an ordinary man, he is the legate and representative of Christ. . . 165

Contents.

7

CHAPTER XI. SECRET OR SEAL OF CONFESSION.

Laws of the Church. Father Kohlman of New York.
It is unheard of that the seal of Confession was ever
violated. Apostate or insane priests. Martyrs to
the seal of the confessional. . . . 175

Chap. X. Cf. "Wandering Knight"
p. 174 et seq. ~~et per totum caput~~

HISTORY OF CONFESSION.

CHAPTER I.

Antiquity of Confession.

Original Sin. Confession of Adam and Eve. The obligation of the Confession of Sin imposed by Almighty God on His people. Confession of David. Solemn Expiation. Confession made by the High-Priest. The practice of Confession always maintained among the Jews.

BEFORE demonstrating from the Gospel the Divine institution of confession, it can be shown that this practice dates from the most remote antiquity.

Our first parents were created in a state of innocence, but did not persevere in that happy condition. To try their fidelity, God forbade them to eat of the fruit of one of the trees in the earthly paradise wherein He had placed them; but the devil, in order to destroy them, insinuated that the eating of

this fruit would communicate to them infinite knowledge and power, so as to make them like unto God: they did eat of it, and thereby established themselves in full revolt against their sovereign Lord.

In consequence of this crime, man underwent a complete revolution; his moral nature was changed, his soul was subjected to the demands of the sensual appetite. The material and animal principle declared war against the spiritual and intellectual; thus man, governed by two contrary powers, saw within himself complete contradiction, which henceforth made of his being two beings opposed to each other, as the great Apostle says: “I am delighted with the law of God according to the inward man: but I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin.”¹

Ovid, who was before St. Paul, thus speaks: “I see what is good and approve of it, and yet I do what is evil.” Catullus at an early date exclaims: “I love and hate at the same time the same object. You ask how it can be. I know not, but I feel it is so.”

¹ Rom. vii. 22, 23.

This original prevarication, made manifest by these two contrary laws or inclinations in the same person, having perverted the nature of man, it became impossible to be brought into life without inheriting corruption; accordingly all the children of Adam are conceived in iniquity and are born sinners.

The expiations and sacrifices used at all times and amongst all nations owe their origin to the remembrance of this original prevarication. From the beginning man thought himself bound to render to his Creator not only sentiments of adoration, love, and thanksgiving, but, having the consciousness of his sin, he endeavored by all possible means to re-instate himself in his former position.

If, after being purified from original sin, men happened to violate the divine law by an act of their own will, they immediately felt they deserved punishment. In order to escape it, and propitiate an offended God, they hastened to manifest the sorrow of their heart by certain religious acts more or less painful. Confession, that is, the avowal by the guilty of the crimes they had committed, ordinarily formed an integral part of that

expiation ; hence the institution of confession in the Church was a response to the spontaneous cry of the conscience of man, to a practice anterior to Christianity, a practice as old as sin, that is to say, almost as old as the world. The history of the two first sinners brings strong conviction as to the truth of what is here advanced.

Adam revolts against the Lord. God has mercy in store for him ; yet, before He speaks to him words of peace and consolation, He will have him understand his crime and make an humble avowal of it.

“ Adam ! Where art thou ? ”¹ “ I hid myself, because I was naked.” “ And who hath told thee that thou wast naked, but that thou hast eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldst not eat ? ”² In this manner does almighty God put the avowal of his crime in the mouth of Adam, for he answers immediately : “ The woman whom Thou gavest me to be my companion gave me of the tree, and I did eat.” And *I did eat*, behold the confession of Adam ; the confession of the guilt was all that God required. He next addresses the woman :

¹ Gen. iii. 9.

² God caused Himself to be represented by an angel.

"Why hast thou done this?" The woman answers: "The serpent deceived me, and I did eat." And *I did eat*, behold the confession of Eve.¹

In all this conversation of the Creator with the two first criminals we see an offended Father, but a Father who in His infinite mercy opens to them His paternal heart, that by confessing their guilt they may rid themselves of the enormous weight which oppresses their conscience.

Such is the origin of confession. This obligation of the confession of sin, in order to be forgiven, has ever subsisted since.

To confess their sins was one of the principal obligations imposed by the Lord on His people: "When a man or woman shall have committed any of all the sins that men are wont to commit, and by negligence shall have transgressed the Commandment of the Lord, and offended, they shall confess their sin, and restore the principal itself, and the

¹ This avowal of their sin by our first parents must have been pleasing to their Creator, since it was followed by the promise of a Redeemer; for such is the meaning of the words: "She shall crush thy head" (Gen. iii. 15), or, as the Protestant version has it: "It," the seed of the woman, "shall bruise thy head."

fifth part over and above, to him against whom they have sinned.¹

It was a maxim generally received among the people of God, a maxim received from God Himself that, “He that hideth his sins shall not prosper; but he that shall confess, and shall forsake them, shall obtain mercy.”² “Be not ashamed to confess thy sins.”³

This confession was not the confession of a man to God, but was to be made to a priest; such is the opinion of the most celebrated commentators. Grotius, a Protestant, expresses himself on this subject in a most remarkable manner. “I hold,” he says, “as most probable the opinion of those who state that among the Jews there was a private confession of sins made to the priests.”⁴

According to Leviticus, he who had committed some sin was to confess it and offer a victim, after which the priest prayed for him and for his sin. “He shall confess that he has sinned in that thing.”⁵

¹ Numb. v. 6, 7. This confession relates to secret offences. It was to be made to a priest, accompanied with due satisfaction, and followed by a sacrifice.—(See verses 7, 8 of said chap. v. of Numb.)

² Prov. xxviii. 13. ³ Eccl. iv. 31. ⁴ Grotius in Matt. iii. 6.

⁵ Lev. v. 5. This is the Protestant translation, which correctly renders this passage of the Hebrew text.

"The sacrifice," says the learned Bartolocci, "was preceded by confession. This confession was not made in the presence of the people, but privately to the priest, and was known to him alone."¹

Philo, the Jew, tells us on this point that the remnants of the victim offered for sin were eaten secretly by the priests in the interior of their apartment, admission being denied to the members of their household, so that nothing might transpire of the faults confessed by the guilty to the ear of the priest.²

According to David Kimchi, a celebrated Jewish Rabbi, not only was such a confession necessary, but, without it, sacrifices could be of no avail; for, he remarks: "All the efficacy of sacrifices consists in the confession of sins and in repentance."³

In certain extraordinary cases the avowal was made to prophets sent by almighty God to receive it. Of this we find a very striking instance in the history of the reign of David.

¹ *Bartolocci*, *Bibliotheca Magna Rabbinica*, part i., page 451.

² The priest was to offer for the transgressor a victim according to the measure and estimation of the sin. (*Lev. v. 18.*) Therefore the priest must have been told the nature of the offence.

³ *Bib. Mag. Rabbin.*, part i., p. 451.

This prince, in order to take the wife of Urias, causes the death of her husband: then the Lord sends Nathan, the prophet, who, on appearing before David *to hear the confession of his crime*, relates the following beautiful parable:¹ “There were two men in one city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many sheep and oxen. But the poor man had nothing at all but one little ewe-lamb, which he had bought and nourished, and which had grown up in his house together with his children, eating of his bread and drinking of his cup, and sleeping in his bosom: and it was unto him as a daughter. And when a certain stranger was come to the rich man, he spared to take of his own sheep and oxen, to make a feast for that stranger who was come to him, but took the poor man’s ewe, and dressed it for the man that was come to him.”

David, hearing this, exclaims, full of indignation, “As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this is a child of death. He shall restore the ewe four-fold. . . .” Nathan immediately replies, “Thou art the guilty one.” *Tu es ille vir.* “Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, ‘I anointed thee king over

¹ II. Kings xii.
Sd. m.

Israel, and I delivered thee from the hand of Saul . . . and if these things be little, I shall add far greater things unto thee.' Why, therefore, hast thou despised the word of the Lord to do evil in My sight? Thou hast killed Urias, the Hethite, with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Therefore the sword shall never depart from thy house. . . . Thou didst it secretly, but I will do this thing in the sight of all Israel, and in the sight of the sun. . . . Thou hast given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. . . . The Lord shall strike with death the child of thy adultery."

Each word of this eloquent discourse is a thunder-bolt which crushes the guilty king and leaves him unable to answer. He is struck dumb, confounded, he can hardly utter in broken accents, "I have sinned against the Lord."—*Peccavi*. Words forever memorable, which obtained for the penitent king the fullest pardon, but obtained it only because they expressed a most humble and sincere confession of his crime.

In the history of the people of God there is nothing more frequently mentioned than the fact of the confession of sins; among

them this practice was indeed always one of the most essential points of religion: hence the *crowds* that began by the *confession of their sins*, when, in the country about the Jordan, John the Baptist appeared to prepare men to receive Jesus Christ, by the preaching of the Baptism of Penance.¹

Apart from private confessions (made by individuals), usual among the Jews, there were also public and general confessions. One of the most remarkable was that which took place on the day of the solemn expiation. "The seventh month, the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls, and shall do no work, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourneth among you. Upon this day shall be the expiation for you, and the cleansing from all your sins: you shall be cleansed before the Lord, for it is a Sabbath of rest, and you shall afflict your souls by a perpetual religion; and the priest that is anointed, and whose hands are consecrated to do the office of the priesthood in his Father's stead, shall make atonement."²

The following were the principal ceremonies of that Feast: The High-Priest washed not only his hands and feet, as in ordinary

¹ Matt. iii. 5, 6.

² Lev. xvi. 29-32.

sacrifices, but his whole body ; he was then vested with plain linen, the clothing-material in use by priests of common rank. Thus dressed, he first offered a young bullock and a ram for the sins of the priests, especially for his own, and placed his hands on the heads of the victims ;¹ he then received at the hands of the princes of the people two buck-goats for sin, and a ram for a holocaust in the name of the whole multitude. Lots were cast upon the goats, one to be killed, the other to be set free. The one on which the lot fell to be offered to the Lord was immolated near the altar of holocausts. The High-Priest took the blood thereof and sprinkled it with his finger seven times before the ark, within the veil which separated the Holy of Holies from the sanctuary.

The living goat was next brought to the High-Priest, “ And putting both hands upon its head, *he confessed all the iniquities of the*

¹ It was a general rule to be observed in sacrifices offered for sins of the priests, or of other individuals, or for those of the entire nation, that the person guilty must himself, or by proxy, put his hands on the head of the victim, thus making a general and public avowal of his sins, praying to God to transfer them to the victim. (See Lev. iv.) The same ceremony is performed over the bread and wine, at the time of Mass, immediately before the consecration.

children of Israel, and all their offences and sins: and, praying that they might light on its head, he turned it out, into the desert.”¹ According to all interpreters of the Scripture these two goats are representatives of the guilty people.

In order to be forgiven, and to recover the liberty of the children of God, how striking is the necessity of *confession* as portrayed in the ceremony performed over the emissary goat!

The Talmud of Jerusalem² records a form of prayer and confession used by the High-Priest in the name of the people whilst putting his hands on the head of the symbolical buck-goat:—“O Lord, I have sinned, I have acted maliciously, I have persevered in evil sentiments and intentions, and I have gone far astray. The evil that I have done I will commit no more. Let it be Thy good will, Lord God . . . to forgive my iniquities, and to remit my offences.³

Since the promulgation of the Gospel the

¹ Lev. xiii. 2.

² Tract. Joma.

³ “The Jews still observe in some degree this feast of the Expiation. As they are not allowed to sacrifice, the men kill a white cock, and the women a hen, on the ninth, at evening. Those with child kill both a cock and hen. They confess their sins . . . and generally spend the forepart of this month in acts of piety and of penance.”—Buxtorf quoted by Haydock.

practice of confession has been maintained among the Jews, as is attested by the most celebrated modern Rabbins. All teach that without penance there is no hope of pardon, and that penance is perfect only inasmuch as it is accompanied by confession: “Penance and confession are one and the same precept; for there is no confession without penance, and it is confession which makes penance perfect.”¹

We find in the old book, “Beth Midoth,” “The penitent must clearly and distinctly confess the shame and disgrace of his evil works; for, if he hesitates on this point, he cannot have sincere repentance in his heart. Therefore let men know that, unless they convert themselves from their sins to God with perfect penance, and confess them, the Blessed God shall take revenge of them and of their evil deeds.”²

It is especially to the dying that confession among the Jews is recommended, whether they die a natural death, or a death under sentence of the law. According to the Talmud, “The Rabbins have taught that, when one is sick and on the point of death, the

¹ Moses Tranensis apud Morinum, p. 128.

² Apud Morinum, p. 130.

following words should be addressed to him : ‘Confess, for all believers observe this practice.’ ”¹

The Mishna relates: “ When the criminal was led out to execution, and was about ten cubits from the place where he was to be stoned to death, they said to him, ‘ Confess,—such is the custom with those who are condemned to die; for he that confesses his sins shall have a share in the world to come.’ ”²

Furthermore, a book most celebrated among the Jews, “ The Book of the Saints,” has the following: “ When they will do penance for their sins, they go and consult the Rabbins about the means they should employ; and for that purpose they make to them a secret confession of all the sins they have committed, either against God or against their neighbor, in order to receive a penance proportionate to the gravity of each sin.”³

Could human language be stronger or clearer to prove that there is not here question of a confession made to God alone?

“ The ancients were so particular in ful-

¹ Tractatus de Sabb. cap xi., Liber Antiquus Beth Midoth apud Morinum, p. 130.

² Tract. de Sanhedrin, cap. vi., ibid.

³ Liber Sanctorum apud Morinum, p. 133.

filling this duty, that they wrote down their sins lest they might forget some one in confession, and in order, also, to excite themselves more efficaciously to repentance."

As to the modern Jews, John Buxtorf informs us that they confess their sins at the hour of death, privately, nearly as the Catholics do. The most ignorant have a general form of confession which they recite.¹

In this chapter we have collected the different passages relative to the practice of confession in the Jewish nation; and, as since the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem the sacrifices prescribed by the law can no longer be offered, the practice of confession appears to be more necessary to that people now than formerly.

"Since the House of the Sanctuary was thrown down on account of our sins," says a celebrated Rabbin named Moses, "there is no other expiation left to us, save that which is accomplished by words; wherefore on the first day of expiation we are all obliged to penance and confession."²

¹ *Buxtorf*, Syn. Jud., cap. xxxv. ² *Talmud of Babylon*, p. 87.

CHAPTER II.

Confession found among the Pagans.

Expiatory sacrifices. Customs of the Athenians. Lugubrious feasts instituted by Romulus. Mysteries of Ceres. Initiation. Confession practised by Marcus Aurelius. Confessors among the Grecians. Magicians of Elis. Confession of the Emperor of China. The Yu-pé. Spiritual Fathers at Thibet. Confession of the Grand Lama of the Talapoins. Of the Siamese. The Gones. Confessors in the kingdom of Persia. Custom and Proverb of the Indians. The Nittia-Carma, or Ritual of the Brahmins. Story of Draupadi and the five celebrated brothers. Account of Valmiky. Confession of the Japanese.

THE candid reader will acknowledge that no reply can be given to the proofs brought in support of the antiquity of confession. Confession of sins was a positive precept enjoined by the Lord upon His people. The Jews practised it, and this custom is still observed by them. It is impossible to question this fact. It was also in use among the various pagan nations, the truth of which assertion can be substantiated by

the strongest and most indubitable proofs. Facts like these are calculated not merely to produce surprise, but, if properly digested, to force upon an honest inquirer the conviction that the origin of confession is to be found only by going back to the unhappy fall of our first parents. There we may easily learn that *repentance is the only substitute for innocence*, and that this repentance is shown by the *acknowledgment* or *confession* that we have sinned.¹

It would take too long to pass in review all the nations which have existed since the creation of the world, and volumes would be necessary for such an herculean task, but I have no fear of being accused of falsehood when I aver that among all the Pagan nations not one is to be found among whom we fail to find at least some trace of confession.

What were all the expiatory rites customary among these peoples,² as shown by the learned Schmitt,³ but so many true confes-

¹ Voltaire says, repentance for our faults can alone take the place of innocence, and that, to show ourselves repentant, we must begin by declaring them.—Vol. 49, p. 414.

² “Among these various forms of religion, not one is to be found which has not atonement for sin as its principal end and aim, man having always felt the need of mercy.—*Voltaire*.

³ Schmitt, *Rédemption du Genre Humain*.

sions? Did they not enclose within themselves the confession, at least *implicit*, that they had done evil, and were desirous of atoning for that evil?

Whenever the Athenians were visited by a scourge, such as famine, pestilence, or the like, they endeavored to turn away the anger of the gods from the people by choosing a man or women among those kept by the State for such emergencies, and offering them as an expiatory sacrifice. The victims were marched through the streets to the sound of music, and afterwards delivered over to be burned, and their ashes thrown to the winds.¹ Who will fail to see that the Athenians, by this ceremony, *confessed* themselves guilty, and adjured the gods to transfer their anger from them to the victim they had substituted and sacrificed for their sins?

Romulus killed his brother Remus, and the ascendancy he had gained over the hearts of the people weakened the impression his crime was otherwise calculated to make; but the gods refused to grant him that pardon which man too readily yielded. In the midst of success and prosperity he was filled with remorse, and horror-stricken at his guilt.

¹ Voyages d' Anacharsis, vol. 2, chap. 21.

The presence of his brother haunted him continually; by day his shadow fell on his steps, and at night his bleeding image intruded upon his dreams. He strove to pacify his conscience and allay these painful apparitions by every atonement which a barbarous religion could suggest. He established mournful ceremonies and feasts, hoping to obtain pardon by forever preserving the recollection of his crime,¹ and *proclaiming the deep repentance which filled his soul.*

But if more striking and positive proofs are desired, rather than inferences drawn from such practices as these, we shall only find ourselves embarrassed in choosing from the mass of testimony which offers itself.

In the religious celebrations of Bacchus, Venus, and Adonis, confession was made.² The priests who heard confessions wore a key suspended from their shoulders, as a sign of the secret they were expected to keep.³

At Samothrace,⁴ expiatory sacrifices, purifi-

¹ Lettres Romaines, by *Baron de Theis*, vol. I, p. 180.

² *Voltaire*, Histoire Generale, vol. I.

³ Recherches sur les Mystères du Paganisme, by *Baron de Sainte Croix*, p. 33.

⁴ An island in the archipelago inhabited by the Pelasgi, or savages of ancient Greece, now called Samandrachi.

cation, and *explicit confession* preceded the admission of the initiated to the mysteries of the Cabires.¹ The priest who presided was called *Koës*, (purifier, prophet,) and had power to absolve from murder, but perjury was considered a capital crime.²

To the Eleusinian mysteries candidates could only be admitted after undergoing a long and painful ordeal. An examination and preparation by a priest appointed for that purpose was also necessary. Those who had been guilty of great crimes were excluded ; others were obliged to prepare themselves by ceremonies and acts of expiation calculated to make them feel the necessity of preferring the light of truth to the darkness of error. The priest exhorted them to repress their passions, and to merit by purity of mind and heart the ineffable blessing of initiation.³ What a striking resemblance between those customs and that which occurs every day in the tribunal of penance !

Emperors themselves were not exempt. History relates that the great Marcus Au-

¹ Priests of Samothrace.

² Religions de l' Antiquité, translated from the German of Dr. Frederic Creuzer, by J. D. Guigniaut, vol. 2, p. 319.

³ Voyages d' Anacharsis, vol. 4, chap. 68.

relius¹ was obliged to confess to the Hierophant,² before being admitted to the mysteries of Ceres which were celebrated at Eleusis.

Among the various people of Greece and Asia, persons disquieted by remorse of conscience were accustomed to ease their minds of the burden of their crimes by submitting to the examination of a particular priest, called the *auditor*, and to whom they were obliged to acknowledge these same crimes.³ They could only be cleansed from them by taking an oath that they would be virtuous and lead pure lives for the future.⁴ This is so true, says Voltaire, that the Hierophant, in dismissing the congregation, always uttered two Egyptian words signifying, “watch, be pure.”⁵ A Catholic can easily imagine he hears, *Vade in pace*,—Go in peace and sin no more.

In Elis there were magicians who were the *directors of conscience* and whom the peo-

¹ Voltaire, *Histoire Generale*.

² Minister of the Eleusinian rites of worship.

³ The recipients were known among all the surrounding nations by a name which corresponded to this oath of the initiated, *qui ineunt vitam novam*, who are to commence a new life by entering into the path of virtue.—Voltaire.

⁴ Voltaire, vol. 51, p. 226.

⁵ *Ibid.*

ple consulted to know whether certain actions were conformable or not to divine justice.¹

Spanish historians tell us that among the natives of Peru confession was practised, which only differed from Catholic confession inasmuch as the penitents were not obliged to make known their sins of thought.²

Modern Paganism furnishes us with similar examples.

When the Emperor of the Chinese, at the head of the nation, fills the office of sacrificer, he performs various religious rites, among which confession is found. Advancing towards the altar, he makes divers prostrations, burns incense, and takes the Yu-pé, a piece of satin upon which he has written, in detail, his good and bad actions, and which he reads in a low voice, making acts of contrition for those which are evil, and promising to do better in the future; this he places in a basin, sets fire to it, and burns it to ashes.³ A lively image of the effect produced by confession when accompanied by contrition;

¹ Voyages d' Anacharsis, vol. 2, chap. 21.

² De la Confession, by Count de Lasteyrie, p. 38.

³ Description of the religious condition of the Chinese in vol. i., p. 129, of Lettres Édifiantes, edited by Abbé Montmignon.

sins are consumed and put away forever.

The celebrated missionary, Father Lecomte, tells us in one of his letters that every viceroy, governor, and mandarin of the Chinese must from time to time declare with sincerity and humility both the secret and public faults of which he has been guilty in the administration of his office.¹

In Thibet,² not only the religious, but almost all secular persons have their *Spiritual Fathers*, to whom they make in general an accusation of their sins. As soon as the penitent pronounces the formula, *I have sinned*, the director says a prayer over him, that he may obtain the pardon he seeks.³ They call this avowal of sins—*tklosira*—which signifies confession.

Four times a month, the fourteenth and fifteenth, the twenty-ninth and thirtieth, the Lamas, devout Thibetians, assemble to hear the explanation of their rule. The Grand Lama, before making his appearance in the congregation, *makes his confession to the one to whom he has confided the direction of his con-*

¹ De la Confession, by *Count de Lasteyrie*, p. 29.

² A vast country in Asia, lying west of the Chinese Tartary and south of Asiatic Russia.

³ *Parallèle des Religions*, by *Father Brunet*, vol. i., p. 296.

science. Having purified himself, he enters into the assembly and advises each one to *confess his sins*, saying, "Come, brethren, raise your supplicating hands to the great *Sciacha*, the great lion you see upon the altar; the author and restorer of our laws. Receive with the strictest attention his divine precepts. Like a horse without bit or bridle, we have sinned greatly by indulging our passions and giving unrestrained license to our heart, our mouth, and our hands. In the powerful law of our glorious *Sciacha* we shall find both checks and encouragement. I am about to explain this law to you. He who by means of these checks shall overcome himself will be victorious and happy, but woe to him who kicks against the pricks. Such a one will pass through all the infinite and formidable punishment of transmigrations. . . . This is the day appointed for the prayer *Sociong*, that is to say, for the washing away of sins.

"The great *Sciacha* teaches us that he who has committed grievous sins and will not confess them from his heart makes himself a liar. Let every one then sound the depths of his own soul, and if he find therein anything of a serious nature, let him say in a

loud and distinct voice, *I have committed great sins.*" This notice having been given three times, if there are any who avow themselves guilty, the superior of the community approaches them and pronounces certain prayers over their heads.¹

In the kingdom of Siam a class of religious mendicants are found, called Talapoins, who go out every morning, about six o'clock, to collect alms. They are to receive whatever is given to them without speaking, without returning thanks, or even so much as a salutation. This rule they observe with great exactness. On their return to the pagoda, they prostrate themselves at the feet of their superior and *make their confession to him*, which being done, he prescribes a suitable penance.² "There are days," says the author of the "Civil and Religious History of Siam," "when the people draw near to whisper in the ear of the priest the tale of their crimes and foibles."³

The Gones, or ministers of religion among the Cingalese, who are a numerous and pow-

¹ Parallèle des Religions, vol. v., p. 306.

² Annals of the Association of the Propagation of the Faith, vol. 5, p. 109.

³ Civil and Religious History of the Kingdom of Siam, by Turpin, vol. i., p. 186.

erful people inhabiting the island of Ceylon, are looked upon as the *physicians of souls*. Whenever a person resolves to be converted and lead a new life, he sends for a Gone, to confirm him in his good resolutions by his advice and counsel. He comes with very great ceremony. Four men carry a canopy over his head, and he is received as if he were a tutelary angel; the most dainty meats are set before him, he is loaded with presents, and entertained for some days, which time he employs in part in giving instructions and pious exhortations to the new convert, and amongst other things chants a canticle containing the chief points of his religion, which he duly explains to him.¹

In Persia the priests are called *Magi*, and are divided into five classes. Those who are appointed to hear confessions, decide cases of conscience, and explain the law, are called *Destourans-Destours*. The Magian books command that those who have offended shall be pardoned, provided they humble themselves and confess their faults. Besides *Néaesch*, which are prayers indicative of humility and submission, and *Afergans*, which are forms of thanksgiving accompanied by

¹ Parallèle des Religions, vol. i., p. 261.

² Ibid., p. 13.

praises and benedictions, these books also contain *Patets*, or acts of contrition for sins committed.¹

The *Sad-Der*, or sacred book of the Parsees,² says in relation to him who has eaten human flesh: “let him throw himself at the foot of the doctor (priest), that he may recite with his intention the penitential prayer, and give him absolution from his sins.”³ The priest, having heard him, whispers in his ear the following words: “O Lord, give him pardon for all his sins, and all his misdeeds, and all his negligences.”⁴

In the same book, the *Sad-Der*, we find the following remarkable passage: “if thou art so unfortunate as to fall into sin, do not fail to cast thyself at the feet of a doctor. . . . when thou drawest near to seek his absolution, the number of thy sins will diminish. . . . Be very certain that a sin thus remitted

¹ Parallèle des Religions, vol. i., p. 9.

² The Parsees or Guebres are descendants of the primitive disciples of Zoroaster, a celebrated ancient philosopher, who acquired great renown among the Persians and to whom he gave laws on religion. The common opinion is that he lived under Darius, that is to say, about 522 years before Christ.

³ Sad-Der; see *De Lasteyrie, De la Confession*, p. 33.

⁴ O Domine, ei condonato omnia ejus peccata, omnia ejus malefacta, omnes ejus neglectus.—*Heyde, Veterum Religio*, p. 579.

no longer exists in the soul of the guilty one, but in its place springs up merit.”¹

Not only is the obligation of confession spoken of in the *Zend-Avesta*, another sacred book of the Parsees, but the formula is thus expressed: “In the presence of the great Ormuzd, of the Amschaspands (sages), in the presence of the priest who serves Ormuzd, of the wise in heaven and on earth, of my relatives and friends, it is the wish of Ormuzd, I renounce every bad thought and every bad action, I declare this before you, O most pure of beings. Have mercy, my God, on my soul and on my body. I renounce my sin in these words, I repent.”² Lastly, a traveller tells us that they confess at the hour of death, to preserve themselves from damnation, and that the religion of Zoroaster requires them to do this. Tavernier says that, when the Persians are sick, they send for their priests and make a sort of confession, after which the priest directs them to give alms and to do other good works in order to obtain pardon.³

We learn from Stobée, that among some of the Indian tribes he who has committed

¹ Apud *De Lasteyrie*, p. 36. ² *Zend-Avesta, Pater De l'Iram.*

³ *Tavernier, Voyage en Perse*, book 4, chap. 8.

faults is taken before a certain number of persons, in whose presence he makes an avowal of them, and asks that intercession with God should be made in his behalf, after which a long fast ¹ is imposed upon him.

We also find in one of the Pouzam, as cited by the *Journal de la Société Asiatique*, an example of public penance. "A merchant of Benares, having acquired a large fortune in an illicit manner, confessed his sins in a public assembly and did penance publicly."²

We also read in "Lettres Édifiantes" that it is a generally received maxim among the Indians that he who confesses his sins will be forgiven. Every year they go to the banks of some running stream to confess, in order that their sins may be entirely washed away. In the celebrated sacrifice *Ekiam* the wife of him who presides is obliged to make a confession, going into the most humiliating detail of her sins, and even declaring the number of them.³ Besides these public confessions, there are also particular and secret

¹ Hi coacti coram aliis, si quid peccati commiserint, confitentur; rogant ut alii Deum pro se exorent; longumque temporis spatium jejunii exigunt.—Stob. Eglog., cap. iv., apud *De Lasteyrie*, p. 31.

² Ibid.

³ Choix de Lettres Édifiantes, 2d edit., vol. viii., p. 146.

ones, and we learn by the Vedas, or sacred book of the Bramins, that every Indian must choose his spiritual guide, who is to direct him in the way of salvation. These guides or directors of conscience are called *Gourons*.¹

The Nittia-Carma, or Bramin ritual,² attributes the virtue of the washing away of sins to the following prayer, which bears some resemblance to those we recite every day. “O Sun, who art prayer itself, and the very God of prayer, forgive the sin I have committed in praying, and all that I have been guilty of during the night, in thought, word, or deed; pardon whatsoever I have offended against my neighbor by calumny or false witness, by partaking of forbidden meats, or receiving bribes from vile men; in fine, forgive me every sin into which I have fallen by night or day, of whatsoever nature or kind it may be.”³

¹ Abbé Dubois, *Mœurs et Institutions des Peuples de l'Inde*, vol. i.

² The Bramins or Brackmins, ancient Indian philosophers, are disciples of Brackman, remarkable for their austerity. In order to become a member of this sect, it is necessary to keep profound silence, abstain from flesh-meat, and fast and pray without ceasing.

³ Abbé Dubois, *Mœurs et Institutions des Peuples de l'Inde*, vol. i., p. 355.

But the most striking example related in the work of Abbé Dubois, entitled "Mœurs et Institutions des Peuples de l'Inde," is the account of Draupadi and the five renowned brothers. It seems impossible not to perceive in it the state of degradation to which man is brought by sin, and the virtue of confession to raise him up and restore him to his primitive dignity.

"When *Chrichnen* was on the earth, the famous Draupadi was married to five renowned brothers, all kings of Madura. One of these princes one day shot an arrow at a tree, which most unfortunately brought to the ground a very remarkable fruit. The tree belonged to a celebrated penitent and had the wonderful property of producing every month a fruit which gave so much strength to the one who ate it, that no other sustenance was needed during the month. In those remote ages, more dread was felt at the thought of being cursed by a penitent than of the anger of the gods, and these brothers greatly apprehended the malediction of the hermit, so they prayed to *Chrichnen* to help them. *Vishnu*, one of their gods metamorphosed into *Chrichnen*, told them he saw but one way of repairing the great evil;

that each of them, including Draupadi, who was also present, must make an *exact confession of all the sins of their past life*. He said the tree whose fruit had fallen was six cubits high, and that, as each one made a good confession, the fruit would ascend gradually, a cubit for each one, and that, when the last was made, it would attach itself to the tree, as it was in the first place.

"The remedy was a bitter one, but they must either decide upon it or expose themselves to the formidable curse of the penitent. The five brothers consented, but it was very difficult to persuade the woman to fulfil her part. The more they urged her to declare her faults, the stronger seemed to be her inclination for silence and reserve, but finally, on representing to her the sad and fatal consequences of the curse of the *Sanias* (the name given by the Indians to penitents), she promised she would do as they wished, whereupon the oldest of the princes began this trying duty, and made a *very exact confession of his whole life*. As he proceeded the fruit ascended, and when he finished it was found to be one cubit from the ground. The others followed his example, so that at the close of their confessions it had ascended

exactly five cubits. Only one more was wanting, but it was Draupadi who must make the final effort. After many struggles she commenced her confession, and the fruit ascended a little; she said she had finished, but it still remained half a cubit from the bough. *It was very evident that she had either forgotten or concealed something.* The brothers begged her with tears not to permit false shame to ruin them all and to overwhelm them with misfortunes. *Chrichnen* came to their aid, and she owned a *sinful thought which she had desired to keep secret.* Scarcely had she uttered it, before the fruit finished its ascent and attached itself to the same branch on which it hung before.”¹

With such ideas were the people of India imbued when Jesuit missionaries first went among them to enlighten them with the light of the Gospel. Is it not most astonishing to find in the midst of a rude and barbarous people the established belief in the necessity of confession, and even the obligation of confessing *sins of thought*, in order to make reparation for the evil they had done, to recover the graces they had lost, and to avoid the chastisement they had deserved?

¹ Lettres Édifiantes, vol. viii., p. 149 and following.

The history of Valmiky is not less remarkable.

“ Cast down from heaven on account of his licentiousness and pride, he resolved to win its favors by penance proportioned to the greatness of his crimes. The Most-High condemned him to pass through four successive stages or regenerations. Brama was docile to the commands of the Eternal. His first appearance was under the form of a raven; the second he came into the world (most miserable mortal) in the lowest and most despicable of the tribes, called *Parias*, under the name of Valmiky. To his low birth were united a sordid soul and an inferior intellect, and he became a veritable villain. He established himself in a thick forest near a frequented highway and enticed weary travellers to his cabin by a show of free and generous hospitality; but it was only that he might rob and assassinate them during the night. He followed this course for a number of years. One night two Richis¹ came to his cabin and asked permission to sleep there. Valmiky made preparation to treat them as he had his other victims. His arm was already raised to strike the fatal blow, when

¹ Richis, saints, inspired persons.

he was seized with sudden terror, and felt himself deterred by supernatural power. . . . The travellers awoke; they saw Valmiky with the deadly weapon in his hand, pale, agitated, and terror-smitten. The Richis strove to gain his confidence, and by degrees led him to make a full and voluntary confession of all his crimes; they represented to him the wickedness of his life and succeeded in awaking him to true contrition. They then taught him how to do penance, and he gave himself up at once to severe expiations and all the exercises of austere piety. . . . In this way Valmiky became a new man; his mind was greatly enlightened, and he recovered his pristine strength and intelligence."¹

This account of Valmiky is the history of the fall of man, of his crimes and his excesses, and of the pardon he obtains by making a *voluntary confession*, and yielding himself to the exercises of penance.

We also find confession practised in Japan, but in a most singular and cruel manner. Travellers inform us that penitents who desire to make their confession retire to the deserts and yield themselves to the guidance of savage hermits, who conduct them to

¹ Religions de l'Antiquité, vol. i., p. 228.

others, still more barbarous than themselves, and who live upon the edge of precipices, and these latter oblige them to walk on the steep declivity of rocks, where they are obliged to hold on to the branches of the trees in order to keep themselves from falling, and when they become almost exhausted by this painful exercise, the monks prescribe to them to make their examination of conscience, and that in a painful posture. To this they add occasional blows with a club, which greatly increase their prostration. The unfortunate penitent is then placed on a scale, at the extremity of a balance wheel, which, by means of a spring, is suddenly suspended over a yawning abyss. In this tormenting position he is obliged to make his confession in a voice so loud as to be heard by the bystanders.

If he hesitates, or his sincerity appears doubtful, or if, from their knowledge of his previous life, they think he is guilty of falsehood, the scale is turned, and the poor victim is hurled into the abyss.¹

Whatever impression may be made by this collection of facts and testimonies in favor of auricular confession, it must be admitted to be truly astonishing to find this custom more

¹ *Études sur la Confession*, p. 333.

or less implicitly acknowledged among these various nations, and to perceive that for the most part they have *spiritual Fathers, physicians of souls, directors of conscience, ecclesiastical confessors, etc.*

Finding that these poor Pagans have believed and still do regard confession as a necessary condition of forgiveness, shall we not remark with Lasteyrie, in his treatise on this subject,¹ “it is most remarkable to find confession, though with various modifications, in every quarter of the globe, even among those nations most distant from each other, and having no connection or communication?”

It can only be explained, as mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, by attributing it to a revelation made at the time of the fall, and which has been preserved with more or less variation, teaching that by repentance alone could we be restored to the favor of God, and that this repentance must be made by a sincere confession.

¹ De la Confession, by Count de Lasteyrie, p. 39.

CHAPTER III.

Obligation of Confession established by Jesus Christ.

Instances of Confession mentioned in the Gospel. The establishment of Confession promised. Jesus Christ gives to His Apostles and their Successors the power of forgiving and of retaining Sins. Confession is essentially annexed to the judicial powers given to the Apostles. How did the Apostles and early Christians understand the words of Christ?

EROM what has been said in the preceding chapters, the reader must feel convinced of the antiquity and universality of confession.

But now the question arises: To what cause could be attributed the assent of nations to this practice, had it not been revealed from the beginning that by repentance alone is obtained forgiveness, and that the essential test of this repentance is the frank and sincere avowal of our sin?

When Christ came upon earth He found

confession already established. His first disciples, many of them at least, had *confessed* before adhering to Him. They were chiefly the multitudes from Jerusalem, Judea, and from all the country about Jordan, that came to John the Baptist, “were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins,”¹ and were by the Precursor sent to Jesus Christ, before whom he had come to prepare the way; for “John baptized the people with the baptism of penance, saying: That they should believe in Him who was to come after him, that is to say, in Jesus.”²

It was not until after His resurrection from the dead that Our Lord established confession; yet, it is remarkable during His public life how He requires or supposes confession before granting His grace.

The Publican went down to his house, justified, rather than the Pharisee; but the former, “standing afar off, would not so much as lift up his eyes towards heaven; but struck his breast, saying: O God, be merciful to me, a sinner.”³

The woman of Samaria received the gift of faith, and so ardent zeal for the glory of Christ as to become herself an apostle of her

¹ Matt., iii. 6.

² Acts xix. 4.

³ Luke xviii. 13.

Saviour, for, “she went into the city, and saith to the men there: Come and see a man who has told me all things whatsoever I have done. Is not He the Christ?” But before granting her this grace Christ had brought her to avow her sinfulness: “I have no husband.” And Jesus said: “Thou hast said well: I have no husband.” To which she replies, not denying, but, implicitly at least, confessing her sins, “Sir, I perceive that Thou art a prophet.”¹

A parallel case is that of the woman taken in adultery. Jesus suffers her to remain for some time standing in His presence, convicted by her accusers, ashamed of her crime. Her silence was a confession, a very painful confession. Now will follow the words of peace: “Go, and now sin no more.”²

Who can read without deep emotion the parable of the Prodigal Son? He had grievously offended his father, had wasted his substance, living riotously, had become a slave, a keeper of swine! He must die abroad, in a far country, or go to his father. “I here perish with hunger.” But will his offended father receive him? Yes, he will, and with open arms; he will weep with joy over him,

¹ John iv.

² John viii.

yet only because he will *avow* his guilt : “ Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee ; I am not now worthy to be called thy son.”¹

How touching, how humble, and how courageous the confession of Magdalen ! She knows the proud Pharisees will pass remarks upon her, she knows there is a large and noble company in the house. No matter, she will listen only to the dictate of her conscience : she has need of forgiveness, she will go and ask it and *proclaim her guilt*.

Though she cannot utter a word for emotion, yet her tears and her actions are an humble confession. “ Many sins are forgiven her.”² She hears the words full of comfort, words which the priest now addresses to the penitent that has confessed. *Go in peace.*

The following quotation is another instance of pardon granted by Jesus Christ to a sinner who had *avowed* his crime. One of the thieves that were crucified with Our Saviour blasphemed Him, and, no doubt, died in his sins. The other thief was sorry for his crimes and said, “ This man hath done no evil. And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds.” Here is the *avowal*, the

¹ Luke xv. 21.

² Luke vii. 47.

confession! Jesus said to him, “This day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise.”¹

The preceding examples are not meant to prove the establishment of auricular confession; they are intended to show that the Lord has ever loved to forgive those that *avow* their guilt, and that the disciples of Christ were prepared to receive an institution of the kind.

In regard to the institution of confession, the same method is observable as in the institution of the most important sacraments of the New Law.

“They were first announced and prefigured under the law of nature as well as under the Mosaical Dispensation; they were afterwards promised and instituted by Jesus Christ. Finally, the faithful were commanded to receive them, and *complied with the precept.*”²

Thus baptism was under the law of nature prefigured by the ark of Noe and by Circumcision; under the written law, by the passage through the Red Sea, and by the pond called Probatika:³ then, at the advent of the New Law, by the baptism of St. John. It was

¹ Luke xxiii. 41, 43.

² Bellarmine.

³ John v. 2. It might also be said, by many ablutions or baptisms used among the Jews.

promised by Jesus Christ,¹ and next made obligatory.² Finally, in divers passages of the Acts and of St. Paul's Epistles, it is recommended and administered.

In the same manner the Eucharist was figured, under the law of nature, by the bread and wine offered by Melchisedech ; under the written law, by the Paschal Lamb, the Manna of the Desert, and the Loaves of Proposition ; and, in the very days of Christ, by the miraculous multiplication of the Loaves. Next, it is promised,³ then established,⁴ and, after that, its reception is commanded by the Apostles, and practised by Christians.⁵

This may be likewise demonstrated in regard to confession; for God requires it under the law of nature, prescribed it more distinctly under the written law,⁶ and it was prefigured different times in the days of Christ.⁷

¹ John iii. 5. "Unless a man be born again of water and of the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

² Matt. xxviii. 19.

³ John vi.

⁴ Matt. xxvi. 26, 27, 28.

⁵ Acts. ii I. Cor. x., xi.

⁶ Since confession was required in the Old Law, the inference is that there must be a confession of a superior kind in the New; just as the ablutions and oblations of the Old Law were types of the Sacraments of Baptism and holy Eucharist, which far surpass the former in dignity and efficacy.

⁷ See Chapter I.

Finally, it was promised by Jesus Christ, established by Him, practised by the early Christians, and prescribed by the apostles.

As to the promise made by Jesus Christ, He says Himself, “I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven.”¹

Some great power is certainly here promised. “*Blessed art thou, Simon, and I, (the Christ, the Son of the living God) say to thee.*”

Again, the same promise is repeated to the apostles in general: “Amen, I say to you, whatsoever you shall bind upon earth, shall be bound also in heaven: and whatsoever you shall loose upon earth, shall be loosed also in heaven.”²

Next, the institution of confession presents itself: “Now, when it was late that same day, the first of the week, and the doors were shut, where the disciples were gathered together for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them: Peace be to you. And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and

¹. Matt. xvi. 19.

² Matt. xviii.

His side. The disciples, therefore, were glad when they saw the Lord. And He said to them again: Peace be to you. As the Father hath sent Me, I also send you. When He had said this, He breathed on them, and He said to them: Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them: and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.”¹

Nothing can be imagined more solemn than this apparition. He who appears is really the Saviour. He has now finished His work,—triumphed over death by His resurrection!

It was really He! Not only did He show them His hands and His side, but He said, “It is I, fear not. . . . Handle and see: for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as you see Me to have.” He did eat before them.²

He appears to those whom He had called by name, whom He had loved, for whom He had prayed, whom He had chosen that they might go and bring forth fruit, to whom He had previously said, “Whatsoever you shall bind upon earth, shall be bound also in heaven, and whatsoever you shall loose upon earth, shall be loosed also in heaven.” It is

¹ John xx. 22, 23.

² Luke xxiv. 36, 39.

the very day of His resurrection, ten days only before His ascension.

Jesus gives to the apostles His peace, which the world cannot give, bestows on them the means for conveying it to others.

In fine, He sends them as the Son was sent by the Father, endowed with all the faculties or authority essential to the continuance of the great work of man's sanctification.

When God formed man, He breathed on him a breath of life, and infused into him a pure, innocent soul. On the day of His resurrection Jesus Christ breathed on His apostles, animated them with His own spirit, and made them partakers of His almighty power, that they might restore to man the primitive purity which he had lost, and raise the dead in sin to spiritual life.

Finally, the apostles received from Christ the power to forgive sins, when He said, "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them." For who could suppose, with the promise beforehand, and the many solemn preludes to the last words, that the apostles on His first apparition should find they had been deceived?

The reluctance of some persons to admit that Jesus Christ gave to the apostles the

power to forgive sins is very difficult to be accounted for, except on the supposition that the nature of the delegated power is not sufficiently understood. To have the power to forgive sins does not imply that the Church can forgive sinners who remain impenitent; on the contrary, she fully admits that God can not grant a power of that kind; the Church lays no claim whatever to it; it would lead to immorality.

But did the Redeemer authorize His apostles to forgive the sins of penitent sinners? Yes, undoubtedly, He did: He had the power to do so, and He did it in the most explicit manner.

He Himself, indeed, was pleased to demonstrate that so great a power could be granted by almighty God, for, as His enemies murmured because He said to the man sick of the palsy, "Thy sins are forgiven thee,"¹ He performed a miracle to show that the *Son of man* had power on earth to forgive sins, that He, as man united to the Divine Nature, had power to remit sins on earth.

This communication of extraordinary power to the apostles did not make them equal to Christ. They had it not of themselves, it

¹ Mark ii. 5.

was He who gave it; He forgave through their agency; they were His ministers, and the power delegated to them was of no value if exercised contrary to His will.

The words of Christ conveyed the power which they expressed. The apostles of Christ did most certainly receive from Him the power to forgive sins.

Was this power granted to their successors? Yes, most certainly. Christ here addressed officials whose commission was to last forever, who received His blessing the fortieth day afterward, that they might go and baptize and teach all nations, with whom He promised to abide all days, even to the consummation of the world. The power of the Keys was given to be perpetual, as the commandment to preach and to baptize is permanent. If the Church had not this power, she could not be the Church established by Christ; she would no more resemble the Church founded by Him than any society which to-day calls itself the Church of Christ, but which from the beginning did not teach and baptize all nations. Moreover, remission of sins is as much needed at present as it was in the days of the apostles; so, now there must be, as formerly there was, a remedy for

sin established by Jesus Christ, who is our peace, and who preached peace to us that were afar off, and peace to them that were nigh.¹

From the granting of this power, the obligation of the confession of sin is inferred; for Christ would have it exercised with judgment and discretion; sins are sometimes to be remitted, sometimes to be retained. The apostles and their successors are the established judges; the absolution which they grant, or which they refuse, is a true sentence pronounced by them.

Say not that Infinite Wisdom established in His Church a judicial office to be exercised arbitrarily or capriciously.

The divine Master has certainly willed, and could not will it otherwise, that the ministers of His justice and mercy should use the delegated power with prudence and discretion. (Whosoever sins should be remitted, are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins should be retained, are retained.) Our Lord has then willed that the sinners should be known to the judge; yet, what knowledge could the judge of consciences have of the sins which oppress them, if the guilt were

¹ Eph. ii. 17.

not disclosed to him. “In confiding to His ministers the exercise of His mercy and justice, God has not communicated to them His omniscience. In that divine and secret tribunal, entirely separated from the interests of earth, entirely concealed from all human eyes, there can be no other accuser or witness than the criminal himself.”¹ This is what we understand by confession.

The reader sees “that it is so essentially connected with the judicial power with which Jesus Christ clothed His ministers, that without confession they could not exercise the functions of that judicial office ; unless you say that Jesus Christ, in delegating the power of the Keys, desired to establish a new kind of despotism, and send forth judges with power to condemn or absolve *without knowledge of the cause.*”²

A comparison borrowed from a celebrated missionary,³ will give new force to the argument taken from the words of Jesus Christ. “A monarch can no longer suffice to administer justice : therefore he assembles some of the most virtuous and enlightened men of his kingdom and says : ‘ Go into all my prov-

¹ *La Luzerne.*

² Amicable Discussion, letter xi.

³ Sermons du *Père Guyon.*

inces and there administer justice; I grant you my authority for this purpose. I will absolve those that you shall absolve; I will condemn those that you shall condemn.' These men start on their way. Think you that they will send some to prison or to the scaffold, and dismiss others quite free, as fast as they are presented to them, at hap-hazard, and without examination? Certainly not; they know well that their master, in telling them he would approve whatever they did, meant to say, 'Go, but judge well; hear the witnesses, hear the criminals themselves, reflect before you act, and let your judgments be grounded upon justice and equity.' Make the application now. Put, if you choose, these words of the king in the mouth of Jesus Christ, and say whether the apostles could give them an interpretation different from the one we give them ourselves?

Therefore the words of Jesus Christ to His apostles contain a formal precept, imposed on Christians of all times and places, to confess their sins to the successors of these same apostles, in order to obtain forgiveness.

It is as certain that there exists an obligation of confessing sins, as it is certain that Jesus Christ said, "Receive ye the Holy

Ghost: Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them: and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained." Here, as in any other matter, duty is correlative to right. Confession is not only an obvious consequence of the sacerdotal power, but the necessary and absolute condition of its exercise.

It will doubtless be said, in virtue of Our Saviour's words, that, when sinners desire to be reconciled to God, and have recourse to His ministers, they are obliged to make themselves known to them.

But are they absolutely bound to go to them? Is there no other means than confession to obtain the pardon of sin? No, there is none. If there were, it might be truly said that Christ's words are false and unmeaning. What, indeed, would happen, if in the Church there did exist another way to be reconciled to God besides that of confession? If, for instance, it might suffice to humble one's self before God, to pray to Him, to fast, or to give alms? The consequence would be that no one would confess his sins, for who would supplicate a favor at the feet of his fellow-creature when it might be easily obtained without his aid, or even against his will? But, then, what becomes of the magnificent

promise made by Jesus Christ to His ministers; and to what extent can it be true that they forgive and retain sins? The promise becomes a ridiculous and an illusive declaration; and they can neither forgive nor retain sins at all, if they never have an opportunity to exercise their ministry. Hence, either there is an obligation for sinners to confess their sins to the priests, or there is deception in the word of Jesus Christ, "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them: and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained."¹ As also in the following words, "I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven," for, of what use the keys of heaven, if sinners can enter it without them, independent of the priestly office to open it?

The above forcible argument is confirmed by the testimony of the Council of Trent. That learned, highly celebrated, ecumenical assembly declared that "the words of Christ above quoted were always understood in the Church to mean a sacrament established by

¹ No minister of God can retain any sin where there is no obligation to confess it; for the sinner may say, I have other means to obtain the forgiveness of my sins. Yet Christ said, "Whose sins you retain, they are retained." Sins are retained by not granting the penitent absolution from them when he is not sufficiently prepared to receive it.

Jesus Christ, to reconcile those who sin after Baptism; and that, from the institution of this sacrament, the Church has ever understood that a full confession of sins had also been established, *and is, by divine right, necessary to all who have sinned after Baptism.*"¹

The words which Jesus Christ addressed to the apostles were by them explained to the Catholic Church. The apostles wrote to their Christian contemporaries:—"All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Christ: and *hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation.* . . . We are therefore ambassadors for Christ, God, as it were, exhorting by us. For Christ, we beseech you, be reconciled to God."²

St. James also wrote, "confess your sins one to another."³ The early Christians understood the apostles in the same sense as the Church expounds their writings at the present day, for "many of those that believed *came confessing and declaring their deeds.*"⁴ They were not satisfied with a vague confession, made in general terms; for they were directed not only to confess their sinfulness, but to confess their *sins*, and

¹ Council of Trent, Sess. xiv.

² II. Cor. v. 18, 19.

³ James v. 16.

⁴ Acts xix. 18.

they really came, and confessed, and declared, or, (as the Protestant version has it,) “confessed, and showed their deeds,” that is, they related minutely and distinctly all their transgressions. Hence St. John says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all iniquity.”¹

The following chapter will throw still more light upon this interesting subject.

¹ I. John i. 9.

CHAPTER IV.

Confession has always been practised in
the Church of Jesus Christ.

Innocent III. and the Fourth Council of Lateran. The absurdity of saying Innocent III. invented confession. Every Father of the Church has taught that it is necessary in order to be restored to the grace of God. St. Bernard. St. Anselm. St. Gregory the Great. St. Sidonius. St. Augustine. St. Jerome. St. John Chrysostom. St. Gregory of Nice. St. Ambrose. St. Gregory of Nazianzen. St. Cyril of Jerusalem. St. Ephrem. St. Basil. St. Irenæus. Lactantius. St. Athanasius. St. Cyprian. Origen. Tertullian. Eusebius. St. Clement. St. Denis the Areopagite.

THE obligation of the confession of sins in order to obtain pardon of them follows necessarily from the judicial authority conferred by Jesus Christ upon His apostles. The oft repeated story of the invention of confession by Pope Innocent III., in the Fourth Council of Lateran, might be disposed of by this simple reasoning: Jesus Christ instituted confession, therefore Innocent III. could not have been the author of it; but we shall place before

the reader a large amount of testimony to prove that it has been practised in all ages of the Church, and has always been regarded as an indispensable condition for being reconciled to God, and that consequently the words proceeding from the mouth of Jesus Christ have always been understood in the same manner and in the same sense by the Church of God.

The Fourth Council of Lateran was held in the Lateran church at Rome, in 1215.

St. Bernard (died in 1153) asks, of what use is it to confess one part of your sins and suppress the other? to cleanse one half and leave the other half unclean? Is not all visible to the eye of God? Shall we dare conceal anything from him who holds the place of God in this sacrament?

St. Anselm (died in 1109), in his homily upon the ten lepers, expresses himself in this manner: "Faithfully disclose to the priests all the spots of your interior leprosy, by an humble confession, to the end that you may be cleansed."¹ "As original sin is remitted

¹ *St. Bernard*, Work on the Seven Degrees of Confession.

² Ite, ostendite vos sacerdotibus, id est per humilem oris confessionem sacerdotibus veraciter manifestate omnes interioris vestræ lepræ maculus, ut mundari possitis. *St. Anselm*, Opera de colon., p. 176.

in baptism," says the same holy doctor, "so actual sins are remitted in confession. It is a veritable judgment, for there are two judgments of God: one here on earth, in the sacrament of penance; the other at the Last Day, when God will be the judge, the devil the accuser, and man the accused. In the sacrament of confession the priest, holding the place of Jesus Christ, is the judge, the penitent both the criminal and the accuser, and the sentence pronounced is the penance imposed."¹

St. Gregory the Great (died in 604), in explaining the words of the Gospel, "*Lazarus, veni foras*," asks of sinners: "Why do you bury your sins in the depths of your conscience? Draw them forth from that abyss by confession, and you will be loosed from their burden by the ministrations of the priest, as Lazarus was unbound by the hands of the disciples of Our Lord."²

Again he says, "there are three things to consider in a true penitent—conversion or change of heart, confession by the lips, and the punishment of sin. Of what use is it to

¹ St. Anselm, in *Elucidario*, quoted by *Denis de Sainte Marthe*, *Traité de la Confession*, p. 357.

² St. Greg. Magn., lib. 6. in cap. 15, lib. 1. Neg.

confess our sins with the lips when the heart is not converted? We frequently meet with persons who confess their faults with sincerity, but who are not converted because they do not in the least detest them.”¹ And again, in his homily on these words of St. John, “whose sins you remit they are remitted,” he expresses himself in these terms: “It is well to consider the wonderful degree of glory to which Jesus Christ has raised His apostles. . . . They are the depositaries of the power of the sovereign Judge, holding the place of God, remitting the sins of some and retaining those of others. Signal honor, but one the weight of which is so overwhelming to human weakness!² Still again, he asks, what is confession of sins, if not the opening of our wounds, because the venom of sin, which lies concealed within our souls and would destroy their life, is discovered and rejected by confession, to the health and salvation of him who makes it. What

¹ Cur reatum tuum intra conscientiam abscondis? Foras jam per confessionem egredere, qui apud te interius per negationem lates. Veniat itaque foras mortuus, id est: culpam confiteatur; venientem vero foras solveret discipuli. *St. Greg., Hom. 26.*

² *St. Greg. Magn.*, in cap. 20.—S. Joan.

do we do in confessing but disclose the maladies within us?"¹

In a letter written by St. Sidonius, Bishop of Clermont (died in 489), to one of the chief magistrates, after remarking that bishops were charged with piercing the secret ulcers of unclean consciences, he adds, "it is not with the judge of the world as with a president or judge of the court. In your tribunals, those who confess their crimes are condemned, but in confessing to us they confess to God and are absolved."²

St. Augustine, (died in 430) admonished the faithful of his time in this manner: "Let no person say, I do penance in secret in the presence of God; it suffices that he who is to grant me pardon should know the repentance which I feel in the depths of my heart. If such were the case, it would be without reason for Jesus Christ to say, Whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven, or that He should have confided the keys to His Church. It is not, then, sufficient to confess to God; we must also confess to those who have received from Him the

¹ *Confitendo peccata quid agimus, nisi malum quod in nobis latet ut operimus?* *St. Greg. Magn., Hom. 49 in Evang. S. Luc.*

² *Sid. Epist. 13, lib. 4.*

power of binding and loosing.”¹ Among his works we find a treatise upon the visitation of the sick, which, in point of fact, was not written by this Father, but nevertheless the author is very ancient; it contains this remarkable passage: “There are some who imagine it is sufficient for their salvation to confess to God, from whom nothing is concealed, and who reads the secrets of all hearts, for they are unwilling, either from motives of shame, or pride, or contempt, to show themselves to the priests, although Our Lord has appointed them to discern between the different kinds of leprosy. Disabuse yourself of such an opinion, and be not ashamed to confess to the vicar of the Lord. For we must submit to the judgment of those whom He has not disdained to put in His place. When, then, you are sick, send for a priest to come to you and disclose to him all the secrets of your conscience. Do not permit yourself to be led astray by the false religion of those who tell you, in visiting you,

¹ Nemo sibi dicat: ego occultere pœnitentiam ago, novit Deus qui mihi ignoscit. . . . Ergo sine causa dictum est: quæ soleritis. . . . Ergo sine causa sunt claves datae ecclesiæ Dei? Frustramus evangelium, frustramus verbum Christi. . . . —*S. Aug. Sermo II., in psalm i., n. 3.*

that confession made to God alone, without the intervention of the priest, is capable of saving you. We do not deny that it is often necessary to address ourselves to God, and make our confession to Him, but, before all things, we have need of the priest. Regard him as an angel sent by God; open to him the innermost secrets of your heart; reveal to him whatever causes you most confusion; be not ashamed to declare to one man what you have not blushed to commit in the presence of many. Make, then, an entire confession, without dissimulation or excuses for your fault. Be simple and exact; make no evasions or circumlocutions, which only obscure and embarrass the truth. Note the circumstances of your sins, the places, occasions, and the persons, without, however, naming them.”¹

St. Jerome (died in 420), teaches the necessity of confession in a no less positive

¹ Sunt quidem qui sufficere ad salutem autumant, si soli Deo confiteantur crimina . . . sed nolo ut ipsa decipiariis opinione. . . . Nam ipsius sub eundem est judicium, quem Dominus non dignatur sibi vicarium. . . . Astantem coram te sacerdotem angelum Dei existima . . . aperi ei penetralium tuorum abditissima latibula . . . quæ mentum gravius exacerbant Dei angelo manifesta . . . designanda sunt etiam in quibus peccasti loca, etc.—Inter op. S. Aug.

manner. “ If,” says he, “ the infernal serpent has inflicted a secret wound on any one ; if, without witnesses, he has insinuated the venom of sin, and the unhappy victim obstinately refuses to disclose this wound to his brother and master, the master, who possesses the power of healing, can no more effect a cure than a physician can heal the disease of a sick man who is ashamed to expose his case to him, for how can he administer to a complaint of which he is in ignorance? The ministration of the sacrament of penance is confided to the bishops and priests of the Church ; they have the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and in a manner are to judge before the Day of Judgment, for it is to them that Jesus Christ said, through the person of Peter, I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven : whatsoever you shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever you shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven.”¹

“ The fornicator and adulterer,” such are the words of the great Chrysostom (died in 407), “ or any man, whoever he may be, who has been guilty of a grievous sin, cannot silence the reproaches of his conscience.

¹ *S. Hyeron.*, vol. iv., p. 75.

Though his crime may be hidden from the world, he knows it himself, and is thereby subjected to continual agitation. What means shall he adopt to profit by this remorse of conscience, to appease this devouring fire, to silence this interior tormentor, which scourges him night and day? Let him make an humble confession; let him deposit the burden of his soul in the breast of one who will not reproach him, and who will apply the remedy; let him confide his secret to him alone, without witnesses, and let him tell all with the most rigorous exactness. Go, show your wounds to the spiritual physician, and he will give you the remedies to cure them. To confess one's sins is to efface them."¹

After a text so clear and positive, how could Benjamin Constant assert in one of his works that St. Chrysostom taught *we must confess to God, and not to man?*² And this is not the only passage in which this holy Father acknowledges the authority of the priests to bind and loose. "Weak creatures, placed on this miserable earth to be called to the dispensation of the things of heaven, to

¹ *S. Chrysostom.*, Edit. des Benedictins, vol. iv., p. 175.

² *De la Religion.*

receive a power not given to angel or archangel! For not to them was it said, *Whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever you shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven.* The princes of this world have power only over the bodies of men, but this power extends to spiritual bonds, and its effects reach even to heaven... The sentence pronounced by the priest on earth God ratifies in the mansions of glory, and confirms it with His seal. He has clothed His ministers with His own power. '*Whose sins ye shall remit, shall be remitted, and whose sins ye shall retain, shall be retained.*' Can you conceive power greater than this? It is written that the Father has given all power of judgment to His Son; this power, I say, He has equally communicated to His priests."¹

In this manner does St. John Chrysostom express himself in his admirable treatise on the priesthood. Can we believe, then, that, having thus established the power granted to priests to remit and retain sins, he would destroy it by dispensing sinners from the obligation of making known to them the state of their conscience, and of submitting

¹ De Sacerdotio, lib. iii, cap. 5, translated by *M. Guillon.*

themselves to their guidance in the exercises of penance? Hence he wishes "that all those who are oppressed with the weight of their sins should be well persuaded that they must submit themselves to the priests in order to be discharged therefrom."¹ Again he says: "He who has charge of souls should enter into the recesses of the heart by a strict research, that nothing may escape him: he must acquire an entire knowledge of every malady, that he may be able to apply thereunto suitable remedies."² In his homily upon the Samaritan woman he takes occasion from her example to exhort the faithful not to be ashamed to confess their sins; however, he adds, the contrary happens, for we do not regard Him who is one day to be our Judge, and tremble before those who can do us no harm, fearing to receive some confusion on their part. But we shall be punished by that which is now the subject of our fears, because he who is ashamed to reveal his sins to a man, but does not blush to commit them in the sight of God, who is unwilling to confess or do penance, will be covered with ignominy in the terrible day of judgment, not merely in the

¹ L. ii., De Sacerdotio.

² Ibid., cap. 4.

presence of one or two persons, but in the face of the assembled universe.¹

We might recite many other passages from the same Father, establishing not less clearly the necessity of confession of sins to the priests, but those already given are sufficient.

"If he who has secretly stolen anything," says St. Gregory of Nice (died about 400), "will declare his sin to the priest, and if he will quit his inclination to vice, in order to embrace virtue, he shall be cured of his malady."² "Expose without fear to your spiritual Father whatever lies most deeply concealed; show him the depths of your heart, as you would show your hidden sores to a physician."³

"Nothing is so concealed," writes St. Ambrose (died in 397), "as not to be one day revealed. That which you are now unwilling to disclose to those who sit in Moses' seat, will one day be made known in the face of the universe. Would you bury

¹ Qui enim detegere homini peccata erubescit, Deo vero cernente facere non erubescit, neque confiteri vult, et poenitentiam agere; in die illa non coram uno vel duobus, sed universo terrarum orbe spectante traducetur.—Hom. de mul. Samarit.

² Si per declarationem peccatum suum sacerdoti aperuerit.—Epist. ad Leotium.

³ Idem., Hom. adv. eos qui alios severius judicant.

in eternal oblivion this long chain of prevarications? Hasten to make an humble avowal of them to the priest, it is the great art of keeping them forever secret.¹

“Confession, and fleeing the occasion of sin,” says St. Gregory Nazianzen (died about 389), “are most excellent remedies against vice. One of the greatest graces we should ask of God is that of correcting ourselves by the rigor of our confessions.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem (died in 386), in his primary catechism, exhorts to interior regeneration by the exercises of penance and exomologesis, or confession, not only public but particular and in detail, in the following decisive words: “Confess the sins you have committed: whether by word or deed, whether in the light of day or under cover of darkness.”²

“You are ashamed to confess your sins,” says St. Ephrem (died in 379); “rather blush at having committed them.”³

¹ “Numquam magis tecta quam in confessione detecta.” *St. Ambrose*, as cited by *M. Guillon*, vol. ix., p. 462, of the Bibliothèque choisie des Pères de l’Église.

² *St. Gregory Nazianzen*, Orat. 15.

³ *Confitere quæ perpetrasti, sive verbo, sive opere, sive noctu, sive interdiu.—St. Cyril*, Catech. I.

⁴ *Apud Guillon*, vol. viii., p. 333.

St. Basil (died in 378) holds precisely the same opinion. "We must necessarily disclose our sins to those who have received authority to dispense the mysteries of God."¹

Eusebius (died about 338), Bishop of Cæsarea, relates, in his "*Ecclesiastical History*," a very remarkable fact upon the subject of confession.

"Gordien governed the Roman empire six years, and was succeeded by Philip. It is related that this emperor, who called himself Christian, came to the church on the vigil of Easter, hoping to participate in the prayers of the faithful, but the presiding Bishop would not permit him to enter into the church until he had made his confession, and he was placed among those penitents who had been guilty of human frailties. In truth, the Bishop would never have received Philip, if he had not first fulfilled his penance, for he had been guilty of many crimes. But the emperor was docile and obeyed, thus showing by his actions that he was actuated by a true fear of God, and that his feelings were very religious."²

¹ Peccata iis confiteri necesse est quibus mysteriorum Dei concredata dispensatio est. *St. Basilius*, apud *Libermann*, vol. iv., p. 167.

² *Eusebius*, *Ecclesiastical History*, c. 27.

Lucius Cœlius Firmianus Lactantius (died in 325), in his work entitled "Institutions," explains what was meant by circumcision of heart; according to him it consists in the retrenching of sins by confession, and he shows that circumcision of the flesh in the Old Law was but a figure of the circumcision of heart to be practised by Christians. "God," says he, "cautions us not to cloak our hearts, that is to say, not to keep hypocritically concealed in our conscience any hidden crime. This is the circumcision of heart of which the prophets spoke, and which God has caused to pass from the mortal flesh into the immortal soul. In truth, God, who has been moved by His infinite mercy to take especial care of our true life and salvation, has proposed penance to us in this spiritual circumcision, to the end that, by laying bare our hearts—or, in other words, confessing our sins in order to make satisfaction to God, we might obtain from Him the pardon He refuses to those who stubbornly persist in doing evil and in concealing that which they have committed."¹ Again he says, "It is

¹ Pœnitentiam in illa circumcione nobis proposuit, ut si cor nudaverimus, id est, si peccata nostra confessi satis Deo fecerimus, veniam consequamur.—*Lact.*, *Instit. div.*, lib. iv., c. 17.

necessary to know that the true Church is that in which confession and penance are practised, which are efficacious remedies for the sins and wounds to which the weakness of our flesh subjects us.”¹

St. Athanasius (died in 373), in speaking of confession, expresses himself thus: “As a man baptized by a priest is enlightened by the Holy Spirit, so he who confesses his sins in a penitential spirit obtains from the priest the remission of them.” “If your chains are not yet broken,” says the same Father, “put yourself into the hands of the disciples of Jesus Christ; for they have been appointed to release you, in virtue of the power they have received from the Saviour: ‘Whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven; whose sins ye remit shall be remitted.’”²

St. Cyprian (died in 258), in his book “De Lapsis,” after blaming those who refuse to do penance, continues as follows: “How much more worthy of praise are those who, having

¹ *Sciendum est illam esse veram Ecclesiam in qua est confessio et pœnitentia.*—*Ibid.*, c. 30.

² *Si nondum soluta sint vincula, trade te ipsum discipulis Iesu; adsunt enim qui te solvant pro potestate ea quam a Salvatore acceperunt; Quæcumque solveritis, etc.*—*St. Athanasius, Tract. in Evang. S. Luc., c. 19.*

neither been guilty of sacrificing, or of asking for certificates from the magistrates,¹ yet, because they have thought of doing so, come to the priest of God to confess with simplicity and sorrow, disclosing the secrets of their conscience, and discharging the weight of their faults from their soul." In another place in the same book he says: "Let each one confess his transgressions while he is yet in this world, and his confession may be heard, and the remission he will obtain from the priest will be acceptable to the Lord.²

Origen (died in 253), in his "Commentary on the Psalms," thus expresses himself: "Ob-

¹ Among those who succumbed during the persecution of Decius, by far the greater number were those who, in order to spare themselves the shame of public apostasy, had taken writings or certificates from the magistrates, in order not to be sought after among the Christians. All holy Bishops looked upon this weakness as an indirect profession of idolatry.

² Quanti et fide majores et timore meliores sunt, qui, quamvis nullo sacrificii aut libelli facinore constricti, quoniam tamen de hoc vel cogitaverunt, hoc ipsum apud sacerdotem Dei dolenter et simpliciter confitentes, exomolegesim conscientiae faciunt, animi sui pondus exponent. . . . Scientes scriptum esse: Deus non irridetur derideri, et circumveniri Deus non potest. . . . Confiteantur singuli peccatum suum, dum admitti ejus confessio potest, dum satisfactio et remissio facta per sacerdotem apud Dominum grata est.—*St. Cyprianus, de Lapsis.*

serve what the Holy Scripture teaches us; that we must not conceal the sins we have committed; for, as those who are surcharged with humors experience relief by having their stomachs cleansed, so those who have sinned, if they bury their sins in the depths of their conscience, are oppressed and nearly suffocated by their own corruption, but if they accuse themselves in confession, acknowledging themselves guilty, they root out the cause of all their misfortunes. But be careful to choose well the person to whom you disclose your sins. First assure yourself of the skill of the physician to whom you are to reveal your weakness; if he decides that your evil is such that it ought to be exposed and treated before the assembled church, either for the edification of your neighbor or your own more speedy cure, you must be obedient to the experienced counsel and ripe deliberations of this chosen physician of your soul.”¹

¹ Vide quod edocet nos scriptura, quia oportet peccatum non celare intrinsecus. Fortasse enim, sicut ii qui habent intus inclusam escam indigestam, si vomerint, relevantur, ita ii qui peccaverunt, si quidem occultant et retinent intra se peccatum, intrinsecus urgentur, et prope modum suffocantur phlegmate et humore peccati. Si autem sui accusator fiat, dum accusat semetipsum et confitetur, simul evomit et delictum,

“Will it be more advantageous to you,” asks Tertullian (died in 245), to be damned by concealing your sins, than to be saved by declaring them?”¹ Again he says, “Oh, the great benefit shame promises us in keeping our sins secret, as if we could conceal them from God by hiding them from the sight of men!”² But to whom shall we declare our sins if not to the priests, “since,” according to the same Father, “to them is accorded the power of absolving from them.”³

St. Irenæus, a disciple of St. Polycarp, who was himself the disciple of St. John, teaches us, in his work against heretics, that certain women, perverted by one Mark, a magician and heretic, confessed that they had been corrupted by this heresiarch, and atque omnem morbi digerit causam. Tantummodo circumspice diligentius cui debeas peccatum confiteri; proba prius medicum cum debeas causam languoris exponere. Si intellexerit talem esse languorem tuum, qui in conventu totius Ecclesiæ exponi debeat et curari; ex quo fortassis cœteri ædificari poterunt, et tu ipse facile sanari, multa hac deliberatione et satis periti illius medici consilio procurandum est.—*Orig.*, Hom. ii. in Psalm 37.

¹ An melius est damnatum latere, quam palam absolvī?—*Tertul.*, c. 10, de Pœnit.

² Grande plane emolumentum verecundiæ occultatio delicti pollicetur! videlicet si quid humanæ notitiæ subduxerimus, perinde et Deum celabimus?—*Ibid.*

³ Presbyteris advolvi, caris Dei adgeniculati.—*Ibid.*, 9.

had burned with impure passion for him.¹ The same doctor says of Cerdon, another heresiarch, that he entered into the bosom of the Church, feigning to be converted, sometimes teaching his errors in secret, and again submitting himself to confession.

St. Clement of Rome, an author of the very first age, says, in a letter to St. James: “He who cares for his soul ought not to blush to confess his sins to him who presides.”² “St. Peter,” he adds, “taught that we ought to disclose even our bad thoughts to the priest.” Again, “let us be converted and turn to God with all our heart while we are in this world, renouncing the evil we have committed in the body, that we may attain the salvation of the Lord, while we have time to do penance. For after we have quitted this world we shall not be able either to do penance or make confession in the place where we shall be.”³

¹ Hae sapissime ad Ecclesiam Dei conversæ confessæ sunt et secundum corpus exterminatas, ab eo velut cupidine inflammatas valde illum dilexisse.—*S. Iren.*, lib. i. contra hæres., c. 3.

² Si in alicujus cor, vel livor vel infidelitas latenter irrepserit, non erubescat qui animæ suæ curam gerit hæc confiteri ei qui præest.—*S. Clemens.*

³ Quamdiu sumus in hoc mundo, de malis, quæ in carne ges-

Finally, St. Denis the Areopagite, a contemporary of the apostles, in his eighth epistle to Demophylus, rebukes a priest who had dealt too severely with a sinner, and had so far forgotten his duty as to censure another priest more enlightened and indulgent than himself. The Lord, says he, takes upon His shoulders him who has scarcely forsaken his backslidings, and excites the good angels to rejoice at his conversion. He is merciful even to those who return Him only ingratitude; He makes His sun to rise on the just and on the unjust, and gives His life for those who fly from His presence; but you, as your letter proves, have rejected, I cannot imagine for what reason, a young man whom you call a sinner, who came to cast himself at the feet of the priest. This unfortunate person told you with supplication that he had come to seek a remedy for his vices, but you have unfeelingly repulsed him, and have even insolently insulted the good priest who had compassion on him and justified him.¹

simus, ex toto corde resipiscamus, ut a Domino salvemur, dum habemus tempus pœnitentiae. Postquam enim e mundo exivimus, non amplius possumus ibi confiteri, aut pœnitentiam adhuc agere.—*S. Clemens, Epist. ii. ad Corinth.*

¹ Tu vero, ut tuæ litteræ declarant, accendentem sacerdoti illum quem impium et peccatorem dicis, nescio quomodo, per te præsens repulisti.—*Epist. viii. S. Dion. Areop.*

The foregoing is surely sufficient to demonstrate that confession was practised before the Fourth Council of Lateran, and that the precept has always existed in the Catholic Church. It also fully establishes that the Council in question, in ordaining that the faithful of both sexes should confess their sins at least once a year, imposed no new yoke upon them, but merely regulated and determined the time when they must be obedient to that precept which has God Himself for its author.

CHAPTER V.

The Divine Origin of Confession Proved by the Councils of the Church and by numer- ous Facts drawn from the First Ages.

The councils upon Confession. Public Canons in England under king Edgar. Confession of the religious. Of bishops and priests. Of kings and emperors. Of the military. Confession in times of danger. Before Communion. Before confirmation. During Lent and before the principal festivals. Confession preparatory to leading a new life. Before the translation and visit of holy relics. At the hour of death and during serious illness. Before going to punishment.

EAVING shown, by testimony from the Fathers, that the precept of confession has always existed in the Church of Jesus Christ, it is nevertheless cheerfully conceded that, notwithstanding the many witnesses in its favor, much less was spoken of it in the first ages than in our days. Nor is this in the least surprising, for confession was much more rare among the faithful of the primitive Church than among us. Bap-

tism was then ordinarily conferred late in life, and after many and long trials. History tells us, for example, that Constantine received it only a few days before his death. Then the perfection required of catechumens before admitting them to a participation of the Christian mysteries oftentimes excluded them for many years. But when they had had the happiness of being regenerated in the Lord Jesus, they generally lived in great innocence and often participated in the Eucharistic feast. A large number of them might have given the remarkable answer of an Indian converted to Christianity to a missionary, who, in passing by, asked him if he would like to avail himself of the opportunity to go to confession. "What," said he with charming naïveté, "is it customary, after being converted and receiving baptism, for Christians amongst you to return again to their sins?"¹

The various Councils of the Church not only prove satisfactorily the necessity of confession, but that it has always been practised by all classes of the faithful, and has ever been considered as a necessary condition of being restored to the grace of God. These

¹ *Études sur la Confession*, by Abbé Pernet, p. 359.

assertions can also be substantiated by many examples drawn from the first ages of the Church.

The Council of Laodicea, held about the year 366, ordains “that those who have fallen into divers sins, but who, by perseverance in prayer, accompanied by confession and penance, give marks of a true conversion, should be allowed to receive holy Communion, after a penance proportioned to their sins should have been imposed upon them.”¹ But how could a penance proportionate to their sins be imposed, if their sins were not known, and how could they be known, if not through the channel of confession?

The First Council of Chalons (held in 644) recommended penance as necessary for all men, and ordains “that priests should impose penance after having heard the confession, and declares that this doctrine is the doctrine of all the Fathers, or rather that of the Universal Church, represented by its pastors.”²

¹ Eos qui diversis delictis peccant, et in oratione *confessio-neque* et poenitentia fortiter perseverant, et a malis perfecte convertunt, tempore poenitentiæ eis pro delicti proportione data, propter Dei miserationes et bonitatem offerri communioni. *Labbe, Collect. Conc.*, vol. i., *Conc. Laodic.*, can. 2.

² Ut poenitentibus a sacerdotibus, *data confessione*, indicatur poenitentia, universitas sacerdotum noscitur consentire.—*Conc. Cabilon.*, can. 8, apud *Labbe*.

The Council of Rheims (held in 639) decrees, "that none but pastors should hear the confessions of penitents during Lent,"¹ thus determining, in advance, the obligation of confessing to one's own priest, which has been the law of the Church since the Fourth Council of Lateran, in virtue of the Canon commencing with these words, "Omnis utriusque sexus."

The Council of Nantes (held in 656) decrees, in the fourth Canon, "that, as soon as the priest or pastor shall learn the sickness of one of his parishioners, he shall visit him, and that, having entered into his chamber, he shall give him holy water and sprinkle his chamber with the same, saying the antiphon, *Asperges me, etc.*; then, having sent every one out of his room, he shall admonish the sick person to make his confession."²

The Council of Constantinople (held in 692) expresses itself in the 102d Canon as follows: "It is necessary that those who have received from God the power of binding and loosing should consider the quality

¹ *Nemo tempore Quadragesimæ pœnitentiam confessione audiat præter pastorem.*—Conc. Rem., can. 8, apud *Labbe*.

² *Annales Francorum*, vol. iii.

of the sin, and should have regard to the marks of true conversion, given by the penitent. Thus shall they be enabled to apply a remedy suitable to the malady, lest, straying from the bounds of moderation, either by excessive rigor or over-indulgence, they labor in vain to re-establish the health of the sick.”¹

But does not this exact knowledge of the nature of the sin, and of the dispositions of him who seeks a remedy, imply on the part of the penitent an exact and faithful confession of the sins he has committed, and of such circumstances as might change their character, or aggravate their guilt?

The First Council of Germany (held in 745) forbids ecclesiastics to remain in the army, except such as are necessary to celebrate the divine mysteries, to carry the images and relics of the saints, and to hear confessions. “Let a prince have one or two Bishops with their priests and chaplains in his company, and let a colonel have one priest, who can judge those who con-

¹ Oportet eos qui solvendi et ligandi potestatem a Deo accep-
perunt, peccati qualitatem considerare et ejus qui peccavit ad
conversionem promptum studium.—Conc. Constantinop., can.
102, apud *Labbe*.

fess their sins, and impose penance upon them.”¹

The Council held in England (787), in the kingdom of Kent, in which Pope Adrian presided by his legates, decreed that no one should approach holy Communion until he had submitted to the judgment of the priest, and brought forth fruit worthy of penance; and that, if it happened that a person died *without* penance and *confession*, prayers must not be said for him.²

The Third Council of Tours (held in 813) enjoins upon bishops and priests “the most enlightened prudence in the postponement of the Sacraments which they prescribe to those who confess their sins to them, to the

¹ Servis Dei per omnia armaturam portare, vel pugnare, aut in exercitum aut in hostem pergere omnino prohibuimus; nisi illis tantum, qui propter divinum mysterium, missarum scilicet solemnia adimplenda, et sanctorum patrocinia portanda ad hoc electi sunt; id est, unum vel duos episcopos, cum capellanis et presbyteris eorum princeps secum habeat: et unusquisque praefectus unum presbyterum, qui hominibus peccata confitentibus judicare, et indicare poenitentiam possit.—Conc. Germanic. I., 782, can. 2, c. 6, p. 1533.

² Et juxta judicium sacerdotum, et modum culpæ, eucharistiam sumite, et fructus dignos poenitentiae facite. . . . Si quis autem, quod absit, sine poenitentia aut confessione de hac luce dicensit, pro eo minime orandum est.—Conc. Calent., apud Labbe, c. 6, p. 1872.

end that the time of trial may be proportioned to their faults.¹

The Sixth Council of Paris (held in 829) forbids priests to frequent religious houses without an inevitable necessity. Nevertheless it allows them to go *for the purpose of hearing confessions*. This shows plainly that confession was then regarded as an indispensable obligation.

The same Council forbids bishops to give their priests commissions which will oblige them to absent themselves from their churches; "they do not consider," it says, "that during such absences divine service ceases in places consecrated to the Lord, *that the faithful sometimes die without confession*, and children without being regenerated by baptism."² Behold, according to this Council, the misfortunes which follow the non-residence of pastors; some perish for not having received baptism, others for not having been able to confess their sins before

¹ Episcopis ac presbyteris diligenti cautela pertractandum est, qualiter hominibus sua sibi delicta confitentibus tempus abstinendi adscriberent, ut juxta modum peccati poenitentibus indicetur abstinentia.—Conc. Turon., can. 22.

² Homines *sine confessione*, et infantes *sine baptismatis regeneratione* plerumque moriantur.—Conc. Paris, can. 29.

death. Could it teach more expressly the necessity of confession?

The Council of Pavia (held in 850) decrees that public sinners should be obliged to do public penance, and that "such as have sinned secretly *should confess* to those whom the bishops have chosen as suitable physicians to cure secret wounds."¹

Among the Canons made in England under king Edgar (10th century), there are several concerning confession. The first is couched in these terms: "When one wishes to make a confession of his sins, let him arm himself with courage and strength, and let him not blush to disclose his faults, for there is no pardon to be hoped for without confession; it is confession which heals, confession which justifies."²

Numerous other Councils, held many centuries previous to the Fourth Council of Lateran, express themselves not less deci-

¹ Qui occulte delinquent, illis confiteantur quos episcopi idoneos ad secretiora vulnera mentium medicos elegerint.—Conc. Ticinense, can. 6.

² Quando aliquis voluerit confessionem facere peccatorum suorum viriliter agat, et non erubescat confiteri scelera et facinora, se accusando, quia inde venit indulgentia, et quia *sine confessione* nulla est venia; confessio enim sanat, confessio justificat.—T. 9. Conc., *Labbe*.

sively. How absurd it is, then, to declare that confession was invented at that Council by Pope Innocent III.

It may be asked by whom was it practised? By the faithful generally, without distinction of condition or sex. Heartily convinced that it was a divine precept, they acted accordingly. All submitted to the law, and no one said then, what is so often heard in these days, that confession was only fit for women and common people.

They confessed in the monasteries. This statement is fully proved by the Sixth Council of Paris, which we have heretofore cited. It is equally proved in the Life of St. Philibert, founder and abbot of Jumieges, in the seventh century, under Clovis II. "One of his monks, being at the point of death, lost the use of speech. The holy priest who visited him told him, with great tenderness and affection, to press his hand if he had any thing upon his conscience for which he had not done penance. The sick person did so, whereupon St. Philibert went to the church, and, throwing himself upon his knees, begged God to restore speech to the dying man, lest the devil should plunge him in hell on account of his crime. The Saint, having risen

from prayer, was told by one of the brothers that the sick man could now speak and desired to make his confession, which he did, afterwards rendering up his soul to God, so that neither the Saint doubted the mercy of God, nor the sick man fell into despair.”¹ St. Philibert would then have despaired of the salvation of this monk, if God had not granted him the grace to confess this secret sin, which perhaps he had been guilty of concealing in his preceding confessions. Is it possible to acknowledge more forcibly the necessity of confession?

Bishops and priests confessed. Rathier, bishop of Verona (10th century), writes thus to his clergy: “It is not permitted you to consecrate the holy oblation, if you acknowledge you have sinned,² nevertheless, you cannot be saved unless you confess your sins.”³

¹ Ne adversarius animam pro abscondito crimine valeret subvertere in baratum inferni. Ei frater alius nuntiavit quod æger loqui valeret, et confessionem ei dare satageret.—Sect. II., Benedict., page 821.

² Rathier alludes here to a Canon of the Council of Neocæsarea, which forbade priests to consecrate when they were in a state of sin.

³ Oblata non permitteris consecrare, si te peccasse confitearis; salutem non consequeris, si te peccasse non confitearis.—*Itiner. Ratherii.* vol. ii.

St. Isidore, Bishop of Seville (5th century), being about to die, begged the two bishops who were attending him to put on him a hair-shirt and to cover him with ashes; then he confessed his sins and asked for absolution.¹ It is related in the life of St. Beltufo, bishop of Renti (beginning of the 8th century), that, when they were about to transport his relics, the priests confessed to one another, in order to perform the ceremony with due devotion, and approached the tomb of the Saint with faith and trembling.²

Kings and emperors confessed. We read a striking example in the very infancy of the church, in the case of the emperor Marcus Julius Philip, who succeeded Gordien in the year 244, and which we have already cited. According to Eusebius,³ he came to the church on the vigil of Easter, hoping to participate in the prayers of the faithful, but the bishop would not permit him to do so *until he had first made his confession*, for he had been guilty of many crimes. He submitted cheerfully to this condition. Not

¹ *Eloge des Eveques*, by *Godeau*.

² Part ii., sect. Bened., p. 59.

³ *Euseb.*, *Hist. ecclesiast.*, lib. vi.

only did kings and emperors confess, but history has preserved the names of many of their confessors, as St. Ansberg, archbishop of Rouen (6th century), the confessor of king Thierry I.; St. Viron, bishop of Ruremond (7th century), of Pepin le Gros, the father of Charles Martel; St. Aidan, bishop of Wexford, Ireland, of the king of that island, named Brandubh, whom, as is related in his biography, he had raised from the dead; St. Martin, a monk of Corbie, of Charles Martel (8th century); Harlemond, bishop of Mans, of Pepin the Short, who died in 768; St. Corbinian, first bishop of Frisingen, of Grimoald, duke of Bavaria. Offa, a king of Mercy, who died in 796, had for confessor one called Humbert, and St. Aldric, bishop of Mans (9th century), and St. Ansonin, bishop of Camerino, were successively the confessors of Louis-le-Débonnaire, the king of France and emperor of the West. Donat Scot, a bishop, was the confessor of Lothaire, the son and successor of Louis; St. Adalric, bishop of Augsburg (10th century), of the emperor Otho; Didacus Ferdinandus, of Ordogno II., king of Spain (about 923). Queen Constance, the wife of Robert, king of France, surnamed the Devout (11th

century), had for her confessor a priest of the diocese of Orleans, called Stephen; and Henry I., king of England (12th century), Atheldulf, prior of St. Oswald, and afterwards the first bishop of Carlisle, the king having founded this new bishopric to gratify his *spiritual father*,¹ for by this name were those priests called who heard confessions.²

They confessed in the army. Charlemagne (died in 814), king of France and emperor of the West, forbade ecclesiastics to bear arms, or to join the army; this prohibition may be found in the fourth article of his ecclesiastical capitularies. He ordained at the same time, *that one or two bishops should accompany the prince, and that each prefect or colonel should have a priest with him to hear the confessions of the soldiers*, which is a confirmation of the decree of the First Council of Germany, which we have already cited.³ According to the annals of Fulda, king Arnoul, besieging Rome (895), had a Mass celebrated and required his army to perform whatever was suitable. They promised

¹ Lettres de Scheffmacher, vol. i., pp. 233, 234; *Denis de St. Marthe*, passim.

² See *Denis de St. Marthe*, pp. 170, 171.

³ Vol. vii., *Labbe*, p. 1165.

perfect fidelity, and went to confession to the priests.¹ William of Somerset, a religious of Malmesbury, praised the piety of the Norman soldiers, who, before attacking the English, passed the whole night in confessing their sins² (11th century). Duke Conrad when about to give battle to the Hungarians (955), heard Mass and received Communion from the hands of the illustrious Odelric, his confessor, after which he marched against the enemy.³ Alcuin⁴ (8th century), writing to a friend, says: "I am very much pained concerning the march of the troops against the enemy, as ordinarily many accidents occur. Do not forget to fortify yourself for this journey by confession and almsgiving."⁵

¹ Confessionem coram sacerdotibus agentes.—Annals of Fulda.

² Tota nocte confessioni vacantes.—De Gestis Anglorum, lib. 3, c. 15.

³ Post missæ celebrationem, sacramque communionem ab egregio porrectam Odelrico, confessore suo.—Chronique de Magdebourg.

⁴ Alcuin, called in the royal academy, Flaccus Albinus, and brought into France by Charlemagne, was a deacon of the Church of York. Under the auspices of this monarch, he founded many schools, at Paris, Tours, Aix-la-Chapelle, etc., and revived the arts in the empire. Charlemagne employed him in many negotiations, and gave him several abbeys. He died in 804, aged 70 years.

⁵ Iter tuum confessione confirmare memento.—*Alc.* Epist. 46.

They confessed in times of danger. The author of the Life of St. Bertin (died in 709) relates the following incident, which occurred in his time. The city of St. Omer being besieged by the Normans, the inhabitants, that they might obtain the assistance of God, purified themselves by confession and Communion.¹

They confessed before approaching the holy table. "If your hands were dirty," says St. Anastasius of Sinai, a religious of the sixth century, "you would not dare to touch the robes of the king; how, then, will you presume to receive the King of kings in a heart sullied by sin? But in order to be pure, we must fly from evil, be cleansed from our defilements, and efface the stains of sin by confession and tears. It is in this manner we must approach our holy mysteries. Confess, then, your sins to Jesus Christ, through the priests; condemn your actions, and be not ashamed to do so. . . . Condemn yourself before men, that the Sovereign Judge may justify you before angels and the whole world."²

¹ Vie de St. Bertin, lib. ii., c. 7.

² In confessione et lacrymis, animoque humiliato. . . . abstergere peccatorum maculas, sicque ad intemerata mysteria

"Let each one prove himself," says St. Paulin, patriarch of Aquileia, who lived in the eighth century, "before receiving the body and blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ. When, then, we are preparing ourselves to receive Him, we ought first to have recourse to confession and penance; we must carefully examine all our actions, and if we perceive any considerable sins, let us hasten to efface them by confession and true penitence, lest, like the traitor Judas, concealing the devil within ourselves, we likewise perish with him."¹

St. Firmin, who lived in the same century, says, "Let those who have committed grave sins not presume to communicate, and to participate in the body and blood of Our Lord, without having confessed and done true penance, according to the advice of the priest."² After this, it is not surprising,

accedere. . . . Confitere Christo per sacerdotes peccata tua,
condemna actiones tuas, et ne erubescas. . . . condemnate in
conspectu hominum.—Hom. de Synaxi.

¹ Antea ad confessionem et poenitentiam recurrere debemus, et omnes actus nostros curiosius discutere, et peccata obnoxia, si in nobis comperimus, cito festinemus per confessionem et veram poenitentiam abluere, ne cum Juda prodiore diabolum intra nos coelantes pereamus.—*S. Paulini opera, Venetiis, 1737.*

² *S. Firm.* Serm. in Sacram Script.

says Father Scheffmacher,¹ to find in the formulas of confession which the ancients have left us, and which so nearly resemble those in our prayer-books at the present time, among the grave sins of which one ought to accuse himself, that of having approached holy Communion with an unclean conscience, not having been careful to purify it beforehand by a good confession. We find this distinctly noted in the formulary of St. Fulgence, who died in the beginning of the sixth century; also in that of Egbert, archbishop of York, who died in the eighth. Both express this sin in the same terms. "I accuse myself of having received the body and blood of the Lord, knowing myself to be unworthy of it, and without having prepared myself for it by confession and penance."² From which it is easy to conclude that all the faithful who felt their conscience burdened with any grave sins regarded it as an indispensable duty to go to confession before participating in the holy mysteries.

They confessed before receiving confirmation. Herald, archbishop of Tours (9th cen-

¹ Lettres d'un Docteur Catholique, vol. i., p. 243.

² Ego corpus et sanguinem Domini, sine confessione et poenitentia, sciens indignus accepi.—Conf. S. Fulg., apud Morinum.

tury), published a decree that persons should prepare themselves for confirmation by first going to confession, that, thus purified, they might receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.¹

They confessed during Lent and before the principal festivals. Chrodogan, bishop of Metz (died in 767), decreed that each religious should confess every Saturday; that the faithful should confess to their own priests during the three Lenten seasons,² that is to say, before Easter, before the feast of John the Baptist, and before Christmas. Reginon, abbot of the Monastery of Prum (died about 909), in the diocese of Treves, relates, in his Chronicle, a statute of the Council of Rouen. Among the questions which a bishop is to ask in his visitation of his diocese let him not fail to demand: "If there be any person in the parish who has passed a year without going to confession, and who has been so negligent as to omit it at the beginning of Lent."³ St.

¹ Moneantur confessiones dare prius, ut mundi donum spiritus sancti valeant accipere.—T. I, capit. reg. franc., c. 65.

² In tribus quadragesimis populus fidelis suam confessionem suo sacerdoti faciat.—Reg. Chronog., c. 32.

³ Si aliquis ad confessionem non veniat, vel una vice in anno,

Egbert, in his "Dialogues," thus expresses himself. "Since the time of Pope Vitalianus,¹ this custom has been received in England, and is observed as legitimately established, not only that clerks in monasteries, but also the laity, with their wives and families, should present themselves to their confessors.... that they might receive the Communion of the Lord, on the day of His Nativity, with greater purity."² Does not all this prove that in the eighth and ninth centuries confession was very frequent? and also that it ought to have been more so than at present, since, strictly speaking, Christians are now obliged by the Council of Lateran to confess only once every year?

They confessed in order to prepare themselves for leading a new life. St. Thillo, vulgarly called St. Theau, a monk of Solignac (7th century), desiring to become, by his sanctity, a temple worthy of God, made a confession to a priest of all the sins he had

id est, in capite, quadragesimæ.—*Reginon, de Discipl Ecclesiast., lib. ii., interrog. 75.*

¹ Elected Pope in 657, died in 672.

² Ut non solum clerici in monasteriis, sed etiam laici. . . . ad confessores suos pervenirent.—Dial. *Egbert, vol. vi., Conc. Labbei.*

committed in his youth.¹ In the same age, according to Bede, there lived a very pious man, named Adamnan. In his youth he had been guilty of a criminal action, but, having reflected within himself, he was filled with horror at it. He applied to a priest, confessed his sin to him, and asked him how he should avert the anger of God with which he was threatened.² St. Bavo, the patron of Ghent, in Flanders, and of Harlem, in Holland, was born about 589. In his youth he gave himself up to the vices, too common to that age, but God gave him grace to return from his wanderings. Moved by the preaching of St. Amand, he confessed his sins, employed himself wholly in the exercises of penance, and died the death of the just, on October 1st, 653.³

They went to confession before the translation and visit of holy relics. One example has been already given. Here is another: The author who describes the translation of the bodies of St. Sebastian and St. Gregory the Great, which took place in 826, relates that the most discreet of those who went to

¹ Apud *Bolland*, die 7. Jan.

² *Bede*, History of England, bk. iv., c. 25.

³ *Bibliothèque Sacrée*, vol. iv., p. 205.

offer their devotions to these holy relics first purified their conscience by confession and penance.¹

They went to confession before death and during serious sickness. It is related in the life of St. Sampson, bishop of Dole (6th century), that his father, being dangerously ill, publicly confessed a mortal sin which he had until that moment concealed in his heart.² St. Boniface, apostle of Germany, writing to Ethelbald, king of the Merces (beginning of 7th century), says that king Ceolrede, his predecessor, had passed from this life to the torments of hell, having died without confession and penance.³ This is to suppose both so necessary for the salvation of the sinner, that one can hope nothing from the mercy of God for him who neglects to make use of these remedies before death.⁴ St. Vigbert, (7th century), abbot of Fritzlar,

¹ Secul. Benedict. an. 826.

² Capitale crimen cum veniæ postulatione quod in se celaverat, publicavit in medium. Sæcul. i., Benedict.

³ Sine poenitentia et confessione de hac luce ad tormenta inferni migrasse.—*St. Boniface*, Epist. xix.

⁴ Nevertheless, it is possible for a sinner to save his soul although he may die without confession, if he has, before drawing his last breath, felt perfect contrition for his sins, with a desire to go to confession, had he been able to do so.

in Hesse, burned with zeal for the salvation of souls. The historian of his life remarks that he would at times go out from his cloister to hear the confessions of the sick who had sought for him.¹ Again, in the same age, St. Matilda, wife of the emperor Henry, surnamed the Fowler, had William, archbishop of Mayence, for her confessor, and she confessed all her sins to him a few days before she died. “Before all things, says this princess, hear my confession and give me absolution by the power given you by God.” The empress having finished her confession, the prelate went to the church and celebrated Mass; then he returned to her chamber, anointed her with holy oil, and fortified her by the most holy sacrament of the body and blood of Jesus Christ.²

Finally, those condemned to death went to confession before going to execution. Aribon, third bishop of Frisingen, wrote the life of St. Corbinian, who died in 730. He relates

¹ *Acta secul. iii.*, Benedict.

² Nunc primum audite nostram confessionem et date nobis remissionem, per potestatem quæ vobis tradita est a Deo. Completa confessione episcopus intravit ecclesiam. . . . finita missa rursum intravit cubiculum. Postmodum perunxit eam oleo sacro, et recreavit sacro-sancto corporis et sanguinis Christi mysterio.—*Boll.*, 14 Mart.

that this charitable prelate, not having been able to obtain pardon for a criminal whom they led out to punishment, exhorted him seriously to do penance, and caused all those who were present to withdraw, in order that this wretch might disclose to him, by a sincere and entire confession, all the corruption and wounds of his soul. The criminal gave him marks of true repentance and was then executed.¹

Gregory of Tours relates a similar fact, which happened in the reign of Chilperic (6th century). Daccon, son of Dagaric, having been made a prisoner by order of this prince, and knowing that his end was drawing near, confessed his sins to a priest and demanded penance of him. He then received death with resignation.²

Is it not evident that confession has been practised since the first ages of the Church, and that by all sorts of persons; not merely by the simple faithful, by religious, by bishops,

¹ Adsistentes longius amovit, ut omnem ei putredinem et vulnus animæ suæ confessione purissima aperiret. Part i., sect. 3, Benedict., p. 504.

² A presbytero poenitentiam petiit, qua accepta imperfectus est. *Greg.*, turon., lib. v., cap. c. 25.—Dacco confessus cuidam presbytero peccata sua, poenitentiam petiit, qua accepta, etc. Aimoin, lib. iii., c. 25.

and priests, but by warriors,¹ by princes, and kings; but how (especially these last, who are naturally so reluctant to restraint and submission) have they borne with such docility the yoke of confession, if they were not persuaded that it was imposed upon them by higher authority than that of man?

Bishops alone at first devoted themselves to the labor of confession, but finding themselves insufficient to attend to the multitude of penitents, they shared with the priests the care of hearing them; and we learn from the Gallican Mass (8th century), that the priests, in saying Mass, prayed at least six times for those who confessed to them. Who will say, after all this testimony, that confession had the Sovereign Pontiff, Innocent III., for its author, in the Fourth Council of Lateran?

¹ Ingulph, a monk of Fontenelle, in Normandy, in the tenth century, and author of a "History of the Monasteries of England," relates that it was customary among the English, for him who wished to consecrate himself solemnly to a military life, to make a confession of all his sins, on the vigil of his consecration, with contrition and compunction, either to a bishop, an abbot, a monk, or, finally, to any other priest. After having received absolution, he passed the whole night in the church, in prayer, in devotion, and in penance.—*Denis de Sainte Marthe*, p. 338.

CHAPTER VI.

Divine Institution of Confession proved from Reason.

It is impossible that man could have invented Confession. The divine Institution proved from the agreement which exists on this point between the Oriental and Occidental Churches.

ALTHOUGH we had not that mass of facts and testimonies which demonstrate to evidence that confession was always in use in the Church, and that at all times they believed and taught that it was of divine institution, yet it would be easy to show by the most convincing arguments that confession is not an invention of man, and that the Catholic doctrine on this matter goes back to the apostles, who had received it of Jesus Christ.

It cannot be questioned that, when Luther, an apostate monk, in the sixteenth century, attacked confession, he endeavored to destroy

that which was then the universal practice of the Church. In all the places where the religion of Jesus Christ was known, confession was practised, and practised in the same manner. Confession is, therefore, a divine institution. Either confession is a divine institution, or, as the heretics say, it was in later times imposed on the faithful by the Catholic clergy. Now, if this assertion be true, tell us at what time that practice was introduced, tell us who introduced it, name the Council, point out the statute which established the innovation and imposed on Christians an obligation hitherto unknown to them; show us, at least, that at a given epoch confession was not in use. On all these points heresy cannot give an answer.

If confession be a human invention, there was, therefore, a time when the faithful did not confess; there has, therefore, been a change in the doctrine of the Church, and the Church, from believing confession useless, does now believe in its necessity! We say that such a change cannot have taken place at any time. Suppose that up to this day the faithful were not subject to the law of confession, as a means of reconciliation with almighty God, and that of a sudden they

are told that henceforth no sinner can save his soul without confession. What would they say?—They would justly exclaim, our fathers saved their souls without confessing their sins, why should not we save our souls as they did? Why do they lay a new yoke upon our shoulders? Has almighty God made narrower the road that leads to heaven? Now, what would be said to-day, would have been said at the time of that pretended innovation. Confession could not have been established without great commotion in the Church. Thousands of voices would have been raised to claim the ancient liberty.

A change of so serious a character could not have been effected without resistance, without opposition. Such a change would have been a prominent fact in the annals of the Church, yet not a trace of it is left in the immense number of Ecclesiastical documents.

Finally, the Latins and the Greeks being united to-day in the same belief concerning the sacrament of penance and confession, it must be that both inherited the same belief from Jesus Christ through the apostles, or that some change has been made in the ancient doctrine. Now this change, if it took place, being common to the Greeks and the

Latins, began earlier with the one than with the other. For it cannot be supposed that the two Churches, in the midst of their greatest dissensions, would agree with one mind to make the change referred to. Suppose the Latin Church first began to establish confession as an article of faith (the argument will be equally strong if you suppose the change began with the Greeks), that change in the faith of the Latin Church could not certainly have been ignored by the Greeks, as Catholics of the Latin rite live in the midst of them in many localities. If you say this change was made at the Council of Lateran, there were present at it all the patriarchs of the Eastern Church, either in person or through their deputies, and the decrees of that Council were at the very time translated into Greek. How, then, did it happen that they did not reproach us for a change of so serious a character, whilst reprobating us on account of the smallest innovation on matters of discipline, quibbling about the tonsure and the wearing of beard by the clergy, the fast of Saturday, the singing of the Alleluia, etc.?

It was in the ninth century that the Greeks separated from the Latins, but from the

earliest ages many sects in the East had already swerved from the Catholic Church. Now all, without exception, considered confession as a divine institution, necessary for obtaining reconciliation with God. For instance, the Armenians, converted to Christianity under the Pontificate of St. Sylvester,¹ by St. Gregory, named the *Illuminator*, remained in communion with the Catholic Church for two hundred years. They became schismatics about the year 520, under the patriarchate of Nierces. The practice of confession has been preserved amongst them, as amongst the Arians, the Nestorians, the Eutychians, and other sects in the East, although some abuses have crept in about it, owing to the incapacity of their priests. The form of absolution used by them is as follows: “May almighty God, who loves men, have mercy on you, may He forgive you the sins which you have confessed, and those which you have forgotten, and I, by the authority imparted to me through the Priestly Order, according to the words, ‘whatever you shall loose upon earth, shall be loosed also in heaven,’ by the same words, I absolve you of all the sins which

¹ St. Sylvester, Pope, elected in 314.

you have committed by thoughts, words, and actions, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.¹

The Russian Church, modelled upon the Greek, adopted its discipline and usages, and teaches that confession should be believed in and practised.

From what has been said, we must therefore conclude that confession is not an invention of men, but that Jesus Christ imposed on men the obligation to confess their sins, if they will obtain forgiveness of them.

¹ Lettres Édifiantes, vol. iv., p. 248.

CHAPTER VII.

About Public Confession and Penance, as Practised in the Early Ages.

Institution of the penitentiary priest. Nectarius, in suppressing the office of Penitentiary, did not abolish Confession. The Penitentiary was not the only priest employed in hearing Confessions. Secret Confession always preceded public Confession. Secret sins were sometimes confessed publicly. Bishop Narcissus and his calumniators, Marcus, the heretic. In whose presence did they make public Confession? Of public and solemn penance. The *Weepers*, the *Hearers*, the *Standers*. Solemn penance permitted only once. Divers impositions of hands. Reconciliation of penitents.

THE reader must now be convinced that confession has a different origin from that assigned to it by heretics. We will now speak of what happened at Constantinople, about the year 400, lest any one should object that we designedly refrained from mentioning it. "Nectarius the Patriarch, as is related by Socrates and Soromenes, suppressed the office of Penitentiary, abolished

confession, and permitted every one to receive the holy mysteries according to the dictates of his conscience, which he would certainly not have done, had he believed confession to be a Divine institution." In answer we will state the fact, which strengthens in place of weakening our arguments in favor of confession.

Novetus, a deacon of the church of Carthage, affected to be indignant because they admitted to Communion those who had fallen away in the persecution of Decius, although they had since shown marks of sincere repentance. He taught that crimes so heinous could not be absolved on earth, but were to be left to the judgment of God. In order to arrest the progress of this dangerous heresy, the Church thought it would be well to add to the severity of her discipline. She continued to treat repenting sinners with great kindness and indulgence, but required a longer trial before their reconciliation, and at the same time subjected great criminals to public and solemn penance. The bishops, moreover, appointed for every church a penitentiary priest, who was to observe the manners of the people, receive accusations against criminals, confront them with wit-

nesses, summon them to appear before their tribunal; and these had also to hear the confessions of those who were to undergo public penance, to examine the conduct of penitents, observe how they performed canonical penance, and prevent them from receiving the sacraments, until they had accomplished it to its full extent.

It happened that a lady of rank came to the penitentiary priest of Constantinople, and confessed to him all the sins she had committed since her baptism. In order to try the sincerity of her repentance, the penitentiary imposed on her many fasts and prayers, and also enjoined a public confession of some of her iniquities. But the lady went beyond his directions, and accused herself publicly of another grievous and shameful crime. This avowal caused much sensation and scandal among the people, whereupon a priest, named Eudemon, prevailed upon Nectarius to abolish the office of penitentiary priest, as well as the practice of making public confession. Such being all related by Socrates and Soromenes, what argument can they deduct from it against the establishment of private auricular confession?

Nectarius merely re-established matters as they stood before the persecution of Decius and the schism of Novetus. Bishops and priests continued to hear confessions, but they dispensed with the office of penitentiary, established to regulate the exercise of public and solemn penance. He suppressed what had been an occasion of scandal to the people, abolishing the practice of public confession, a practice which was much in use in the days of early Christian fervor.

It is so evident that confession was not abolished by Nectarius, that St. John Chrysostom, his immediate successor, teaches that without confession we cannot obtain remission of our sins.

One of the two historians whom we quoted, Soromenes, who died towards the middle of the fifth century, sets down as incontestable that confession is necessarily to be made to a priest in order to obtain forgiveness.¹ Anastasius of Sinai, patriarch of Constantinople, in the sixth century, requires of sinners that they should confess before receiving Communion. Nicephorus, in the seventh century,

¹ Cum in pretenda venia peccatorum necessario confiteri oporteat.—lib. vii.

also represents confession as being absolutely necessary.¹

The Council of Constantinople, in the year 692, says the same. Consequently confession was practised among the Greeks in the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries. If there are any who say that it had been abolished, will they tell us by whom it was re-established? If the name of such a man cannot be given, they should cease to advance the assertion that confession was ever abolished.

We have asserted that the act of Nectarius strengthens our argument in favor of confession. For, either the penitentiary priest did, or he did not hear sacramental confession. If he did not, we must infer that Nectarius did not abolish it when he abolished that office; but if the penitentiary used to hear sacramental confession, confession, therefore, was practised in the Church eight hundred years before Innocent III. and the Fourth Council of Lateran.

By stating that Nectarius, after suppressing the office of penitentiary, declared that henceforth any one might approach the sacraments according to the dictates of his

¹ *Nicephorus*, apud Theodosium, de potestate ligandi et solvendi.

conscience, the two historians did not intimate that they might do so without private confession; they simply stated that penitents were dispensed from applying to the tribunal of public penance. Each one was to examine the state of his conscience; those who found themselves free from grievous sin were at liberty to receive Communion without fear of interference from the penitentiary; and those who had sinned grievously might address themselves to any confessor they were pleased to choose. This has ever since been the practice of the Catholic Church. So much about the act of Nectarius, which is no argument against the necessity of confession.

St. Leo, in the fifth century, began to follow in the Latin Church the discipline established by Nectarius at Constantinople. "It suffices," says he, "to disclose to priests, in secret confession, the sins which we know to have committed.¹

We should observe, moreover, that private confession was always made before public confession. This public confession was always regulated by the former, which is named by Tertullian, the *counsellor* of satisfaction.²

¹ Epist. 136.

² Lib. iv. de poenit.

In evidence of my assertion, I could quote a great many positive cotemporaneous testimonies. The following ones of Origenes and St. Augustine, will, I hope, be found satisfactory. Origenes addresses this language to sinners: "The point of importance is rightly to choose the person to whom you will disclose your sin. Be sure to know the doctor to whom you are to expose the cause of your spiritual languor. If he decide that your disease should be exposed before the assembly, for its edification and the speedier curing of your soul, fail not to obey the direction of your experienced and learned counsellor." St. Augustine speaks in the following manner: "Let him (the sinner) go to the pontiff, for to him the ministry of the keys has been confided ; let him accept at his hands the proper mode of making satisfaction; let him perform all which is required to come to salvation and to serve as an example to others; if his sin was very grievous, and caused much scandal, if the pontiff think it expedient for public edification that the crime should be known, not to a few persons, but to all the people, let him not refuse to make public confession."¹ The penitent sinner went first

¹ *St. Aug. Serm. 351.*

to the bishop, or priest, and made to him an humble and sincere avowal of his iniquities. After mature deliberation, the confessor prescribed public confession as a reparation of scandal, if some of the sins confessed were both heinous and notorious. Public confession was also prescribed for secret faults, if their revelation was deemed injurious to no person, and beneficial to many.

Hence the defamer who had blackened the reputation of Narcissus was made to disclose his false accusations; and the females corrupted by Marcus were made to reveal their own sinful actions, in order to expose the hypocrite, and arrest the progress of his errors and shameful practices. In the case of a haughty, contemptuous soul, a wise confessor would prescribe public confession, after employing in vain other remedies of a milder character, in order to overcome his unconquerable pride.

If an open or public confession was likely to compromise the safety or reputation of a third person, a wise confessor was careful not to prescribe it, and the Church had strictly forbiddcn such revelations. A man, for instance, guilty of theft or homicide was subjected to a very long and severe penance,

but could not be obliged to make public avowal of a crime which made him amenable to the laws of justice; in like manner a woman guilty of adultery, which civil laws punished by death, was, indeed, compelled to stand amongst the penitents, yet in one of those degrees which might serve more to conceal than to give suspicion of her crime.¹

In this manner did the Church show how to conciliate the interests of heaven and those of earth, the safety and honor of individuals as well as their progress in virtue, severity in her principles and indulgence in their application. She knew how to repair the scandal without giving rise to it; turned the confession of sinners to their spiritual advantage, and drew from every evil the edification of her children. Under that admirable discipline everything goes on with order and prosperity.

Sacramental confession, established by Our

¹ Our Fathers forbid to defame women guilty of adultery, whether they declared their crime in confession, or that it was made known in some other way, lest their life might be endangered by the conviction of their infidelity; they have directed to place them among the *Standers*, and not to admit them to Communion, until the full expiation of their penance.—*St. Basil, de Amphil.*

Saviour, always goes on foremost: public confession, established by the Church, follows sometimes, but never precedes it; the former, always indispensable, regulates what belongs to its auxiliary. The former, of divine institution, has subsisted from the origin, and shall subsist forever; the second, of ecclesiastical origin, subsisted for a few centuries, and was permitted to go out of use by the same authority which had established it.¹

From the above we see how absurd it is to say that private confession owes its origin to public confession, since the very reverse is the truth. Public confession was made in the presence of the bishops, the priests, and the people. This is already shown by the history of Natalius, mentioned by Eusebius in his "Ecclesiastical History," who threw himself down at the feet of Zephirin,² the clergy, and the people, that he might be forgiven.³ Why before the people? that they might help him by their prayers, and intercede for him with the clergy. The same appears as evidently from the example of

¹ Amiable Discussion.

² St. Zephirin, successor of St. Victor I., elected Pope in 197, died in 217.

³ *Eusebius*, lib. v., can. ult.

four confessors of the faith, mentioned by the same writer, who had been seduced by Novetus. “After they had known the frauds, perjuries, and hypocrisy of Novetus, they abandoned him and returned to the Church, and openly declared his deceitful and wicked actions, in the presence of many bishops, priests, and lay persons, their confession being accompanied with many tears and other marks of sincere repentance.”

Tertullian alludes to the same practice of public confession yet in use in his days, when he says to sinners: “Have recourse to the priests, kiss the knees of the friends of God, supplicate the brethren to pray for you.

As to penance, it was of three kinds, viz., secret, public, and solemn penance. Secret penance was performed in private, as it is in our own days, by order of the confessor. To solemn penance were annexed certain ceremonies: the penitent passed through different stages, of which mention will soon be made. Public penance was performed publicly, but without the ceremonies and stations of solemn penance. Hence solemn penance was always public, but public penance was not always solemn.

Nectarius did not abolish public and

solemn penance, when he abolished public confession: but this public penance became much more rare, and after some time, some say towards the end of the fifth century, it disappeared entirely in the East. In the West it was practised until the end of the seventh century.

Solemn penance was divided into four classes, or stations. There were the *Weepers*, the *Hearers*, the *Prostrate*, and the *Standers*. “In the beginning,” says Fleury, in his “Ecclesiastical History,” “the churches were composed of a portico, through which there was an entrance into a square court, surrounded by pillars, like a monastic cloister; in the middle of the court there was a fountain. . . . at the extremity there was a double porch, from which there were three doors into the church. Within the church, at the entrance, was the baptistery, and at its extremity was the sacristy, which was called the *secretary* and also the *treasury*. Along the church there were little cells for those who wished to pray apart from the people, as there are at present chapels in our churches.

“The church was divided by two rows of columns: towards its extremity to the East

was the altar, behind which was the presbytery, where the priests recited the office, along with the bishop, who sat at the end of the church opposite the door. Before the altar there was a balustrade and chancel. In the middle of the church stood the pulpit, to which there was an ascent on two sides, for it was used for the public lessons ; there was likewise a pulpit for the gospel, and another for the epistle."

The first station was that of the *Weepers*. They remained in the atrium, or portico, dressed in mourning, their head covered with ashes, prostrate on the ground and begging with tears of those who went into the church to intercede for them.

The second station was that of the *Hearers*. They stood in the narthex, or ante-nave ; they might listen to the reading of the Scriptures and the singing of psalms, yet they might not be present at the holy sacrifice, and they had to retire when the Mass of the Catechumens commenced.

The third station was that of the *Prostrate*. Their place was at the entrance of the nave. They might be present during the reading of the epistle and gospel, and during the instructions : and also assist at the first part

of the Mass, called the Mass of the Catechumens, but they were sent out of the church when the Mass of the faithful was about to commence.

The fourth and last station was that of the *Standers*. Their place was in the nave, yet separate from that of the faithful, and they might assist at the holy sacrifice; yet they could not receive Communion nor offer their gifts at the altar, neither were their names recited, as were the names of the communicants.

They remained in those stations a longer or shorter time, according to the enormity of the crimes committed; yet all those who underwent public penance did not pass through all those degrees; it was only done in case of enormous or scandalous crimes. The Church sometimes would condemn sinners to the penance of the fourth station, and dispensed with the other more rigorous degrees.

All mortal sins, whether public or not, were not punished by solemn penance, but only such crimes as idolatry, homicide, and adultery.¹

Solemn penance was granted no oftener

¹ *Billuart.*

than once ; they were not permitted to repeat its exercises, if, after performing it, they fell into the same crimes, or others more heinous. The Church was afraid to disparage that excellent institution by granting twice solemn penance to relapsing sinners. Their salvation, however, was not despaired of, and they were condemned to private penances for the remainder of their lives. They were deprived also of Communion, except at the moment of death. Diverse impositions of hands were used in solemn penance. The first was performed by the bishop in admitting sinners to this kind of penance. At the beginning of Lent penitents presented themselves at the door of the church, covered with sackcloth, barefooted, with downcast eyes and disheveled hair ; after they had entered the church, the bishop with all the clergy recited over them the seven penitential psalms. He laid hands on them, sprinkled them with holy water, spread ashes upon their head, dressed them in hair cloth, and told them he would now chase them out of the church, as almighty God sent Adam out of Paradise. The bishop after this admonition put them actually out of the church, the clergy singing in the mean-

time, “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return to the earth, out of which thou wast taken; for dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return.”¹ The second kind of imposition of hands, which was often repeated, was performed on the *Prostrate*. The third kind was practised when the *Prostrate* passed to the station of the *Standers*. The fourth, when the penitents were admitted to full reconciliation and participation of the holy Eucharist. This was done in the following order, on Maundy-Thursday, according to the ancient Roman ritual. The bishop goes and sits down at the entrance of the church; the penitents with the archdeacon wait for him at a certain distance in the portico. Before presenting them to the prelate this officer addresses him, and represents to him that the time of propitiation has come. The bishop begins the antiphon *Venite*, come, and the archdeacon, in behalf of the penitents, says, “let us bend down our knees;” the penitents genuflect, and the archdeacon sings, *Levate*, arise. The same thing is performed a second time, and the penitents place them-

¹ The Pontifical contains a ceremony very much like the one described here by *Guillois*.

selves in the middle of the portico. Lastly, the bishop having said three times in succession, "come," and the penitents having again bent down their knees, they prostrate themselves before the bishop's feet, and remain there thus prostrated until he rises up from his seat. The clergy continue the antiphon, "Come, sons, listen to me, I will teach you the fear of God," followed by the psalm, "I shall bless the Lord at all times." During the singing of this psalm, the priests, taking the penitents by the hand, present them to the archdeacon, and he presents them to the bishop, who introduces them into the church. Here they stretch themselves prostrate on the pavement; the bishop says the antiphon, "Create within me a new heart," with the 50th psalm, "Have mercy on me, O God," the chanters sing the Litany of the Saints, and as soon as it is ended the bishop pronounces on the penitents the words of absolution; he afterwards sprinkles them with holy water, incenses them, and says, "Arise, you who slumber, and the Lord will enlighten you." They rise up, and with this ends the ceremony.

After a reconciliation of this kind, penitents might not only assist at Mass, but they

might also participate therein by receiving the Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

It follows from the above that there were two sorts of reconciliation, the one imperfect, by which the *Prostrate* passed among the *Standers*; the other one perfect, by which the *Standers* were admitted to holy Communion like the rest of the faithful. The ceremony of imperfect reconciliation might be performed in the church by simple priests authorized by the bishop, or it might be done out of the church, without the bishop's consent, in case of necessity. Ordinary priests never granted perfect reconciliation except in case of death and with the consent of the bishop. Simple deacons might also, in the same case and with the bishop's permission, grant the same reconciliation to penitents, from whence it follows that it was not sacramental absolution. This exterior reconciliation supposed that absolution had been granted, as it is granted in our days, by the confessor to all the sinners whom they find well disposed and ready to fulfil such penance as they think well to impose on them.

The discipline of the Church concerning penance is, nowadays, very different from

what it was in the early ages. Does sin offer to God a lesser outrage, or does divine justice relax its claims to take revenge? Undoubtedly not, but the Church, guided by the Holy Ghost, has thought it advisable to use less severity towards her children, fearing lest she might induce them to lose courage; moreover, in opening to them the treasure of indulgences, she offers them a supplement to the shortness of their penance, and a means to satisfy the justice of Almighty God.

CHAPTER VIII.

Testimonies of Protestants in Favor of Confession.

Acknowledgment of Gibbon. Leibnitz and Lord Fitzwilliam. Louis Bayle. James I. of England. Luther not opposed to Confession. The Confession of Augsburg. The abolition of Confession caused innumerable crimes. Remarkable passage in the Swedish Liturgy. The Lutherans of Nuremberg request Charles V. to re-establish by an edict the usage of Confession. The Protestants of Strassburg express the same desire. The Church of England has preserved the use of Confession. Doctor Pusey. Jules Ernest Naville. Conduct of some French Lutheran ministers with regard to penance.

THE texts of the Fathers and Councils which we have quoted are so clear and positive, that Gibbon, Protestant though he is, cannot refrain from testifying to the truth; for he speaks as follows in his "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire:" "The scholar cannot resist the weight of historical evidence, which establishes the fact that confession was one of the

principal points of the faith of the Papal Church, during all the period of the four first centuries."

Louis Bayle, bishop of Bangor, chaplain to James I., and a celebrated preacher (he died in 1632), is the author of a "Practical Piety," reprinted for the fifty-ninth time in 1734.—In this work we find the following passage: "Remember to send, if possible, for some holy and religious minister, not only that he may pray for you at the moment of death, for God in this case has promised to listen to the prayers of the Pastors and Elders of the Church; but also that, upon an unfeigned Confession and Repentance, he may promise to you Absolution of your sins. For, as God called him to baptize you, so he gave him also the Vocation, Power, and Authority, provided you repent, to absolve you of your sins: 'to thee I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind upon Earth shall be bound in Heaven;' and again, I say to you, —'whatsoever you shall loose upon Earth, shall be loosed in Heaven.'" James I., king of England, has left among other works "Meditations on the Lord's Prayer," in which we read as follows: "As for me, I approve

even private Confession made to a Clergyman, and I wish from my heart it were more in use amongst us than it is, it being an excellent practice, particularly to prepare men worthily to receive the Sacrament."

"From the end of the third century," says the Protestant Doctor Wegscheider, "they find in the Western Church traces of private or auricular confession, joined to the absolution of sins.¹

A great number of other celebrated Protestants have also pronounced themselves in favor of confession.

"Almighty God," says Leibnitz, "bestowed upon His Church a great blessing by conferring upon it the power of forgiving and retaining sins. This power is exercised through the priests, whose ministry no one can despise without sin. . . The remission granted, either in baptism or confession, is equally gratuitous, equally founded upon faith in Christ. Penance is in both necessary for the adult, with this difference, that in baptism, apart from the rite of the ablution, God has left no particular prescription; whilst in the sacrament of penance, to him who will

¹ *Wegscheider, Institutiones Theologicæ Christianæ Dogmaticæ.*

be cleansed, it is commanded to show himself to the priest, to confess his sins, and undergo, according to his judgment, punishment, which may be to him a warning for the future; and as the priests were by Him established physicians of souls, He wills that the sick should discover to them their maladies, and make known the secrets of their consciences. Hence they relate that Theodosius, being penitent, rightly said to St. Ambrosius: ‘To you it belongs to show out and prepare the remedy; to me it belongs to take it.’ . . . Those remedies are the injunctions of the priest to the penitent, that he may become sensible of the sin already committed, and avoid it for the time to come. They are named satisfaction, because this obedience of the penitent is agreeable to God, and diminishes or entirely remits the temporal punishment, which otherwise God would require of us. It cannot be denied that this institution is worthy in all respects of the Divine Wisdom. Assuredly, there is nothing in the Christian religion so noble, so beautiful. . . The Chinese and Japanese themselves admired it exceedingly. Indeed, the obligation of confessing prevents many persons from sinning, those especially who are not yet

hardened ; it gives great consolation to those who have committed transgressions. I look upon a pious, earnest, and discreet confessor as a great instrument in the hands of God for the salvation of souls ; for his counsels serve to direct our affections, to enlighten us as to our faults, to help us to avoid the occasions of sin, to dissipate doubts, to raise the down-cast spirits ; in short, to remove or mitigate all diseases of the soul ; and if we can hardly find anything on earth more excellent than a faithful friend, what happiness to find one who shall be bound by the inviolable religion of a divine sacrament to preserve the faith and succor souls.”¹

Lord Fitzwilliam, in his “ Letters to Atticus,” after explaining the Catholic doctrine about Communion and confession, which should precede it, continues in this wise : “ What security, what pledges are not here required of each individual for the fulfilling of his social duties, for the exercise of all virtues, integrity, benevolence, charity, mercy ! Where else can we find others as great ? Here conscience is regulated before the tribunal of God alone, not by that of the world.

¹ *Leibnitz, Systema Theologicum*, translated by *Mollevault*, p. 269.

Here the guilty is himself his accuser, and not his judge, and whilst the Christian of another communion examines himself lightly, pronounces in his own cause, and indulgently absolves himself, the Catholic Christian is strictly examined by another, expects his verdict from heaven, and longs after that consoling absolution which is granted, refused, or deferred to him in the name of the Almighty. What admirable mode to establish among men mutual confidence, perfect harmony in the discharge of their functions!'

Luther himself was far from being an enemy to confession. "I would rather bear the tyranny of the Pope than consent to the abolition of confession." The above quotation is taken from one of his works; and in his "Small Catechism," published shortly before his death, we read the following passage: "Before God, one ought to acknowledge himself guilty of all his sins, nay, of those which he knows not; yet we have to declare to the confessor only the sins which we know, and which we feel in our hearts. Which are those sins? Examine your condition, your state of life, upon the Ten Commandments; that is, if you are a father, mother, son,

¹ Letters to Atticus, p. 110.

daughter, master, mistress, servant, see if you were disobedient, unfaithful, slothful; if you offended any one in words or deeds; if you were guilty of theft, negligence; if you caused any damage." Such passages show to evidence that in Protestantism, such as Luther had made it, auricular confession was used, and that he had intended that it should be preserved. It is even certain that confession was preserved some time among his disciples, for in the "Confession of Augsburg,"¹ composed by the Lutherans to inform the emperor of what they had retained of the Church of Rome, we read as follows: "Our churches teach concerning confession, that the use of private absolution should be maintained in the churches. . . . Confession is not to be abolished in our churches, for we are accustomed to give the body of Our Lord to none except to those who examine themselves carefully and receive absolution." In this matter, as in many others, they went much further than Luther did.—The practice of confession was abolished: what was the consequence? Crimes without number, disorders hitherto unknown. We read as follows in the Swedish Liturgy, which was yet

¹ Conf. Aug. c xi.

in use at the end of the sixteenth century. “Immediately after the unwarranted relaxation of the ordinary rules about auricular confession, fasts, celebration of feasts . . . there followed such a fearful licentiousness, that every one now thinks he has a right to gratify his passions, and not to listen to any advice.—When you exhort them to confess, in order to ascertain the sincerity of their conversion, to which alone absolution is to be granted, they say aloud that no one ought to be restrained.—When you advise them to fast, they give themselves up to excesses of gluttony. In a word, the horses, as the proverb has it, run away with the driver, and the reins no longer guide the chariot.”¹

The Lutherans of Nuremberg were so frightened at the multiplication of crimes, which almost immediately followed the abolition of auricular confession, that they sent an embassy to Charles V., requesting that he might restore among them, by an edict, the use of confession. The ministers of Strassburg expressed the same desire, in a memorial presented in 1670 to the magistrate. Those requests were treated as they deserved: no attention was paid to them. A

¹ *Abbé Gerbet*, *Dogme Générateur*.

king or a magistrate may have power enough to force men to bend their knee to the ground ; they cannot force them to open their consciences.¹

In our days Protestants have not entirely given up the practice of confession, as is seen by the following from the "Book of Common Prayer," under the heading of the *The Visitation of the Sick* : "Here shall the sick person be moved to make a special confession of his sins, if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter. After which confession, the priest shall absolve him, if he humbly and heartily desire it, after this sort : 'Our Lord Jesus, who has left power to His Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in Him, of His great mercy, forgive thee thine offences; and by His authority, committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.' "

No less remarkable is the following passage, which we copy from the same book. "And because it is requisite that no one should come to the holy Communion, but with a full trust in God's mercy, and with a

¹ Amicable Discussion.

quiet conscience; therefore, if there be any of you who by this means cannot quiet his own conscience herein, but requireth further comfort or counsel, let him come to me, or to some other discreet and learned minister of God's Word, and open his grief; that, by the ministry of God's Holy Word, he may receive the benefit of absolution, together with ghostly counsel and advice, to the quieting of his conscience, and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness."¹

The celebrated Doctor Pusey, of Oxford, ends in the following words a confidential letter to one of his friends: "As to yourself, as you ask my advice, I will say that the first thing to do is to prepare, by imploring the assistance of God, to make a general confession. If you know of no one to hear you, I am sure that Rev. — will. You may tell him that I recommend you to him; he would be an excellent counsellor as to a rule of life. . . . Beg almighty God to enlighten you, to make you known to yourself. You will next divide your life into different periods (or times) and examine yourself for each of them upon the ten Commandments, the seven deadly sins, in thoughts, words, and actions,

¹ Order of Holy Communion.

... in omissions, remembering whatever memory can bring back, the scenes, places, companions, incidents of your life, the persons towards whom you had duties to fulfil . . . etc.; but above all, as I said, pray God to enlighten the most secret recesses of your conscience. You should also try to ascertain the number of each sin, tell whether the habit was unfortunately one of long duration, so as to lay before God, as much as you can, whatever you will know of yourself, beseeching Him to cleanse you of the sins of which you are ignorant. Afterwards receive absolution as the sentence of forgiveness."¹

In the month of June, 1839, a young Calvinist of Geneva, Jules Ernest Naville, defended a public thesis, in which he evinced a remarkable appreciation of the doctrines of the Catholic Church. "It strikes me," says he, "that we need only stop to think to understand how much the Church of Rome, with her Divine authority and the graces of which she disposes, supports us in the deepest wants of our souls. Who has not sometimes, in the midst of the dry passionate discussions which disfigure the religion of Christ, and being tossed to

¹ This letter was published in the *Univers*, Nov. 25, 1845.

and fro by the winds of uncertainty and error, desired to find a tranquil harbor in an authority which could say to him, here is truth! Who has not looked with envy at the tribunal of penance? Who has not wished, in the bitterness of remorse, in the uncertainty of pardon, to hear a voice which could say with the power of Christ—‘go in peace, thy sins are forgiven thee!’ Blessed is the man who never felt such impressions! Blessed is the pure soul who ever preserves such a lively sentiment of the presence of God, and a confidence so entire in the promises of the Saviour, as never to have felt the need of meeting on this earth some infallible organ of the will of heaven. As to me (I know not if I think so alone), did I think that I could find that supernatural power which the Church claims for herself, that power which is the strong, unfailing source of reconciliation, restitution, efficacious repentance, things which God loves most next to innocence; standing near the cradle of man, whom it blesses, standing near his death bed and saying to him, amidst moving exhortations and the most tender farewells: ‘DEPART;’ did I think I could find such power on earth, there are many times when

I would cheerfully go, and deposit at its feet that liberty of examination, which sometimes presents itself to our minds in the shape more of a burden than a privilege."

The thesis of which the above is an extract was fiercely attacked, but the young candidate defended it with great calm, and with arguments so close and logical, that they completely routed all that was brought to bear against them. The admiration of the hearers rose to such a degree that they could not restrain marks of applause, to the great scandal of the professor who argued against Jules Ernest Naville.

In the Ritual of the Danish and Norwegian Churches an article treats of private auricular confession. We see there that the penitent, *after having declared his sins*, prostrates himself at the feet of the minister, who absolves him, by virtue of the power which God granted him of remitting sins.¹

Finally I might name, says M. Gregoire, a certain French Lutheran minister, who at this very day requires confession of his parishioners, because he thinks it necessary. In the year 1800, Doctor Gottlieb Merkel, superintendent of Chemnitz, published a small

¹ *Rituale Ecclesiarum Daniæ et Norwegiæ*, in 12, p. 145.

book in German, the object of which is to demonstrate the necessity of confession.¹

On Sunday, Feb. 24, 1839, a young Protestant minister received the imposition of hands at Montauban, in the church named *le temple des Carmes*. Amongst the questions put to him before the imposition of hands we find the following: “Do you promise to keep secret the confessions you will hear as matters of conscience? R. I promise it.

From all that we have said, the candid reader may draw the inference expressed as follows by the Abbé Gerbet, that ‘Protestantism has a double being, as each individual has. The one declaims against confession; you will easily know it by its angry, hateful tone. The other respects this wholesome institution; and the homage which it renders it, calm as reason itself, bears sometimes the impress of secret sadness and regret, which give a singular force to this cry of their conscience.’”²

¹ *Grégoire*, Histoire des Confesseurs des Rois, p. 145.

² Considérations sur le Dogme génératuer.

CHAPTER IX.

About the Use of Confession.

What is the use of Confession? Answer. Confession reconciles the sinner with God and with himself. The happiness it confers. The cavalry officer and Father Brydaine. Confession prevents despair from entering the soul of the guilty. It hinders a multitude of crimes and scandals. Restitution effected by confession. Incident related by Madame de Genlis. Confession consoles the dying sinner. Confession of Marie Antoinette.

OF WHAT USE IS CONFESSION? Has it not been demonstrated that Jesus Christ was Himself the author of it? Now He is the Eternal Wisdom, how then could He act without motive, end, or aim? Would He impose upon mankind a practice which should have no beneficial results? Is it not rashness, nay, more, blasphemy, to say or even think such a thing? *Jesus Christ instituted confession, and confession useless!* The very enunciation of such a proposition is its own complete and decisive refutation.

What is the use of Confession? It recon-

ciles the sinner with God. The words of Jesus Christ are clear and precise. Sins, He says to His ministers, are remitted to those to whom you shall remit them. Sin had raised a wall of eternal separation between God and the sinner; confession destroys it, and however numerous, or of whatsoever nature his sins may be, the sinner may cry aloud with the Psalmist—"I said, I will confess against myself my injustices to the Lord, and Thou hast forgiven the wickedness of my sin."¹

Of what use is confession? Listen to the reply of a Protestant, who had, when a Catholic, experienced the sweetness of that which he sets forth. Having advised the penitent to approach his confessor, not as a man who will say pleasant and comforting things to him, but as one who has received from God the power of absolving and remitting his sins, he adds, "if you do so, rest assured that the human understanding cannot conceive the transporting joy and peace which inundates the heart of him who believes that he is become a participant of this blessing."²

¹ Ps. xxxi. 5

² Chillingworth, Sermon 7, as quoted by Mr. Milner in his work entitled, *Excellence of the Catholic Religion*.

Truly, when the sinner has thus deposited the burden of his sins, he is, as it were, relieved of an overwhelming load. He feels free and consequently happy. What peace, what security, succeed the storms and agitations of his troubled conscience! It is so consoling to be able to say, I was a captive, dragging after me a heavy chain, one end of which bound me to the eternal pit, wherein a place was already prepared for me, but behold, I am now restored to the liberty of the children of God; I was dead, but am raised to life again. I was poor and utterly destitute, but now I am enriched with the most precious gifts, my old merits are revived, and I am re-established in every right. I was a child of the devil, but now I am a child of God and an inheritor of His heavenly kingdom. The priest of the Lord has said—*I absolve you, go in peace*—and since I heard these consoling words, peace, heavenly peace, reigns in my soul. O confession, thou art the joy of a poor sinful man; thou reconcilest him with God, thou reconcilest him with himself; *Pænitentia hominis rei felicitas.*¹

A pious author² relates that an old caval-

¹ *Tertullian.*

² *M. L'Abbé Carron*, Life of Father Brydaine.

ry officer in one of his journeys passed through a place where Father Brydaine was giving a mission. Being anxious to hear an orator so renowned, he entered the church; it was at the close of the evening exercises, when the missionary was explaining the utility and mode of confession. The soldier was moved, and at once resolved to approach this sacrament. He went to the foot of the pulpit, spoke a few words to the Reverend Father, and decided to remain through the mission. He made his confession with the sentiments of a true penitent. He said it seemed as if some one had taken an insupportable weight from his head. When he had the happiness of receiving absolution, he came out of the tribunal, the witness of his confession, shedding tears in the presence of all. Nothing, he said, could be more sweet than these tears, which, through gratitude and love, ran without effort. He followed the holy priest when he went into the sacristy, and there, in the presence of many missionaries, the loyal and edifying soldier expressed in these terms the sentiments with which he was animated: "Gentlemen, and particularly you, Father Brydaine, pray, listen a moment to me—In my life I have never tasted a pleasure so

sweet, so pure, as that which I experience since I am in the grace of God. I have served Louis XV. for thirty six years, and, truly, I do not believe he can be more happy than I am. No, this prince, surrounded by all the éclat of his throne, amidst all the pleasures which encompass him, is not so contented, so full of joy, as I am since I have got rid of the horrible burden of my sins." Such are the joys they experience who return with hearty sincerity to God.

Of what use is confession? It prevents despair from entering the soul of him who has had the misfortune of falling into grievous sin. If man falls, religion extends to him a helping hand to aid him to rise again; it presents him a plank after shipwreck, and this plank is confession. What would become of the unhappy mortal who has fallen a victim to the seductions of the world and the allurements of passion, without this salutary institution? A prey to remorse, not daring so much as to raise his eyes to that heaven from which he is forever banished, would he attempt to soften divine justice? And if he were disposed to do so, upon what would he found his hope? What voice from heaven would teach him that his sins

were forgiven? What angel come to bring him peace, to re-establish calm in his soul, to terminate his anguish? Trouble would pursue him even to the grave; terror compass him on all sides at his last hour; undefined fears fill him with horror, and he would be given over forever to those avenging furies to which paganism abandons the guilty without resource.¹ Whatever steps man might take to obtain pardon, without confession he could never be fully assured; the infinite sanctity of an offended God would fill him with legitimate doubts as to the reality of his pardon, and these cruel doubts would be sufficient to throw him into despair. The Catholic religion prevents all this by pointing out to him that tribunal of mercy, where the sinner who wishes to be justified may be absolved; where the priest, by a few words, can wash the soul from its stains and restore it to its primitive purity and beauty.

Of what use is confession? It prevents a multitude of crimes and scandals. “The language of passion,” says an old magistrate,² “has so many attractions for fallen

¹ Memoirs of M. de Belval, by an old deputy, p. 287.

² M. Rosset, the author of Theophilus, or the Philosophy of Christianity.

man, that it would be unwise to leave him to the guidance of his own conscience. His heart is an abyss where a thousand dangerous inclinations are concealed, which are seldom perceived by one's self, but which attract the notice of the confessor. Because he has not been guilty of great crimes, he trusts in himself, he is quite satisfied, and thinks he is confirmed in the path of virtue. Either he does not see or neglects to root out certain defects, which appear trivial in themselves, but, nevertheless, may become the cause of grievous unfaithfulness. Only a spark is needed to kindle a great fire. He sleeps in fatal security. Confession bestows upon him abundance of light, which would be wanting in his isolation; the eye of a stranger is always more clear-sighted and sure than one's own; the fatal bandage is torn away, and he who but now prided himself upon his virtues, groans over the state in which he had been living, alas, perhaps for years. It is, then, evident that confession tends to prevent evil by destroying its roots, and that, by enlightening us, it furnishes us the means of fighting more successfully against those rising passions which otherwise might now tyrannize over us."

Yes, confession arrests a multitude of crimes. How many adulteries it prevents! how many divorces it hinders! how many wavering ties it strengthens! For instance, a man, by his bad conduct, forces his wife to separate from him; their children are thereby scattered, and are far from being reared as they ought—to virtue; the interests of all the family suffer by the disunion. The husband, despite his irregularities, is not dead to every sentiment of religion. He repents, goes frequently to confession, becomes faithful and discreet. The wife, on her part, through the charitable exhortations of a worthy pastor, forgives the prolonged wanderings of her husband, and the pair are once more united and live happily together. The children, under the eyes of their parents, become virtuous and useful members of society, and the well-being of the whole family is thus re-established.¹

And how many young persons are preserved in purity and innocence through the instrumentality of confession! It is painful to confess one's faults, and the shame attaching to the avowal of them forcibly arrests

¹ Dr. Ami Badel, a Protestant physician. *Réflexions médico-théologiques sur la confession*, p. 24.

one on the very verge of error. *I will not do that, for if I do I must necessarily confess it.* How much straying and weakness, how many extravagancies and follies, have been averted by this simple reasoning. How many times in the exercise of our holy ministry have we heard homage like the following paid to the efficacy of this sacrament. *O Father, how happy I am to have made my confession; I should have been lost, utterly lost, if I had not prostrated myself at thy feet.* And how often have we heard the guilty, whose heart has been touched by grace, dolorously cry out: *it was the neglect of confession which caused all my misfortunes; I should never have fallen into these crimes, which now weigh so heavily on my conscience, if I had continued to approach that holy tribunal.*

Of what use is confession? Can anything be conceived more consoling and precious to man? Ask the weary traveller, who, in his lonely wanderings, has found a holy man to guide him by his counsel. Far from home and friends, without help in a strange land, what gift from heaven could be for him more inestimable than a worthy confessor, who, feeling the greatness of his mission, receives him in the tabernacle of the Eternal

with kindness and affection, comforting him in his isolation, and leading back his soul to that sweet peace for which he so greatly yearns? "Ah," cries Silvio Pellico,¹ "how unhappy is the man who ignores the sublimity of confession! how wretched is he who, that he may appear a little above the vulgar, thinks himself obliged to look upon it with contempt. Though one may know all that is necessary in order to be virtuous, it is not the less true that it is useful to hear these things often repeated, and that our pious reading and meditations are not of themselves sufficient. No, the words of a living man have quite another power; they move the soul; the impressions made are far deeper, and we find in our brother who speaks a life which we have sought in vain in books, or in our own thoughts."

Jean Jacques Rousseau, in his "*Emile*," answers this question—*Of what use is confession?* when he remarks—*How many reparations—How many restitutions, are made among Catholics through the power of the confessional!*

During Easter time a priest quite unexpectedly remitted to a Protestant clergyman,

¹ Mes Prisons, in 18.

who was in the habit of ridiculing the sacraments of the Church, a considerable sum of money. This very forcible argument so entirely disabused him, that, when a fitting occasion offered itself, he could not help remarking, *I must acknowledge that confession is a very good thing.*

A Swiss Catholic having found a large sum of money on the highroad between Berne and Freiburg, retained it, but going to confession some time after, his director persuaded him to deposit it in the hands of the magistrates of Berne, which he did. This action created a great sensation among the Protestants.

“It is about six months,” says Madame de Genlis, in one of her works, “since some person stole from the Palais-Royal silver plate worth 10,000 francs. It was impossible to discover the author of the theft, nor could I even form a suspicion regarding it. Yesterday the curé of St. Eustache desired to speak privately to me. It was to tell me that he had brought me the plate. It was at the close of Lent, and the thief, wishing to attend to his Easter duties, had made restitution. If, instead of having been educated in the Catholic religion, he had known only that of

the philosophers, he would, like *Figaro*, have thought that what was good to take was good to keep. Two men brought the box containing the silver into my room. The curé asked to have the restored articles examined in his presence. The arms were entirely effaced, a few spoons were broken, and two or three dishes bruised and bent, but the whole was there, not a single piece was wanting."¹ We could cite a thousand other similar examples.

Of what use is confession? It consoles the dying sinner, dissipates his fears for the future, and prepares him for the great journey to eternity. In fact, what has he to fear, however numerous his sins may have been? He has made a humble confession of them to the minister of Jesus Christ; the sentence of mercy has been pronounced over him, and he has a sweet confidence that that sentence has been ratified in heaven.

The celebrated physician Tissot was called in Lausanne to administer the resources of his profession to a young lady, a stranger, whose malady soon reached a very alarming point. Being told of her dangerous condition,

¹ Suite des Souvenirs de Félicie, by Madame de Genlis.

she was greatly disquieted at the thought of dying so soon and abandoned herself to the most violent grief and despair. Judging that this agitation would only abridge the term of her existence, he, according to his custom, gave warning that there was no time to be lost in securing for her the aids of religion. A priest was called; she listened to his words of consolation as the sole good remaining to her on earth. She became calm, occupied herself with thoughts of God and of her eternal interests, and received the Sacraments of the Church with great piety. The next morning the physician found her so quiet and peaceful that he was astonished; the fever had abated, the symptoms had changed for the better, and soon her sickness ceased. M. Tissot loved to relate this incident, remarking with admiration, *how great is the power of confession among Catholics!*

Even now, as I write these lines, they tell me a guilty wretch is condemned to die. He blasphemes and has become a prey to the most agonizing despair. If he obstinately refuses the aid of religion, this despair will accompany him to eternity, but let him ask

for a priest and confess his sins, and soon he will not be the same man. When he has made a recital of his crimes and miseries he will be consoled; when he has opened his heart to the heart of his friend, he will feel his conscience unburdened of an enormous weight, and when the day of his execution shall come, he will ascend the scaffold with resignation and tranquillity, and this happy change he will owe to confession and the comforting words of the priest. Believe me, I relate nothing here of which I have not many times been a witness.

Alas, it is not crime alone which mounts the scaffold. Innocence and virtue are not always exempt. Oh, then, what fortitude and intrepidity are bestowed by confession! We hear a striking instance of it in the person of Marie Antoinette, whose sad history few can read unmoved. After the death of her royal spouse, she was, as you know, incarcerated in a cold, damp dungeon. A weak soul would have been filled with despair, but she found peace and happiness, and this miracle was effected by confession. In those days of execrable memory, when black darkness covered the whole of France, and hell seemed to have let loose upon earth every

sort of wickedness and misfortune, a woman¹ formed the resolution to visit in prison the royal daughter of Maria Teresa. She knew the dangers she had to encounter, the obstacles which would impede her progress; but nothing intimidated her, nothing deterred her, nothing troubled her; jailers, guards, bolts, bars, all gave way to her holy and intrepid spirit, and she made her way to the feet of her queen, who, despite her utter destitution and coarse attire, still preserved her imposing majesty. The next day she contrived to introduce a Catholic priest² into the prison, who heard the confession of the august prisoner, and on the following day the dungeon was converted into an oratory, and the holy sacrifice was offered under its silent vault. The queen approached the altar, and as she received her divine Saviour into her bosom, scalding tears ran down her face and fell to the earth; the source of those tears was in heaven.

Oh, that all France could then have contemplated her royal countenance, brilliant with the rays of that holy faith, enkindled by the fire of divine love. The two guards were

¹ The wife of the jailer.

² The Abbé Magnen, at present honorary canon of Paris.

so impressed by this spectacle, that they fell at the feet of the holy priest and deposited in his heart the burden of their sins. Such are thy marvels, O Catholic religion! Thou alone canst produce them. Whilst unbelief abandons its followers to the anguish of despair, thou charmest away the grief and suffering of thy children, and even their torments thou changest to ecstasy!¹

¹ Sermons upon Unbelief, by my Lord Bishop of Strassburg, page 66.

CHAPTER X.

Ch. p. 7.

Answer to An Objection.

Is it not very hard and humiliating to kneel before a man?

History of Naaman, general of the armies of Syria. Confession has nothing hard and humiliating for the sinner. Comparison. What the Indians think of Confession. The King of Congo laments because he cannot go to Confession, and asks for missionaries. Indians of the Diocese of Vincennes. An Indian travels over 1800 miles to find a Confessor. The Confessor is not an ordinary man, he is the legate and representative of Christ.

Is it not very hard and humiliating to kneel before a man? We answer, God wills it; our duty is to obey. Offended by our revolts, He offers pardon; but He requires as a condition that we shall, with a humble and contrite heart, make to one of His ministers the avowal of our crimes. Have we a right to complain? Ought we not rather bless the mercy and clemency of that good God, who consents at so trifling a price to receive us back to His love and

good will? Had He required of us in exchange for this blessing conditions much more painful, should we hesitate a moment? Should we not be ready to undertake any thing to recover innocence, and throw off the burden of our iniquities?

The Holy Scripture tells us that Naaman, general of the Syrian armies, being infected with leprosy, came to the country of Israel in order to be cured of it. He came to the door of Eliseus, the Prophet, who sent him word by a servant to go and wash himself seven times in the river Jordan, and that he would be healed. Naaman, who thought that the man of God had slighted him, became very angry, and started back to his country, saying, "I thought he would have come out to me, and standing would have invoked the name of the Lord his God, and touched with his hand the place of the leprosy, and healed me. Are not the Abana and the Pharpar rivers of Damascus better than all the waters of Israel, that I may wash in them, and be made clean?" His servants came to him and said to him, Father, if the Prophet had bid thee to do some great thing, surely thou shouldst have done it: how much, rather, what he now hath said to thee, wash,

and thou shalt be clean? Then he went down and washed in the Jordan seven times, according to the word of the man of God, and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was made clean.”¹

Let us reflect a moment on this history. Like Naaman’s, our souls may be attacked by leprosy; the remedy which is offered appears too hard to you, but I will say to you what the servants of Naaman said to their master, “If they had bid you do some thing much more painful, you should certainly do it, for you desire to be healed of your leprosy, and there is no other means to break asunder the chains of sin, to keep away from hell and its eternal torments.”

Is it not very painful and humiliating to go and kneel to a priest? and I say, are we not to wonder that almighty God, who, though He could without injustice annihilate the sinner at the very moment of his revolt, yet condescends to pardon him numberless and enormous crimes on a condition which is not in itself very painful, nay, so easy to accomplish? We repeat it, that condition is not over-painful, and in place of complaining we should be filled with sentiments of the most

¹ IV. Kings v.

lively gratitude. I will here relate an example which bears directly upon our subject. “A man of low extraction was admitted to the court of a person of high rank; nothing was wanting to his happiness. Through the munificence of his protector he enjoyed honors, riches, pleasures. So many favors demanded of him unlimited devotion and affection towards his sovereign; yet such was not the case; carried away by some low passion, the ungrateful man committed against his benefactor a horrible crime, which did not, indeed, become public, but came to the knowledge of the prince, substantiated by invincible testimony. The king, by virtue of his power, passed the sentence of condemnation. Pale and trembling, with eyes cast down, hardly able to sustain himself, the unfortunate man is led to the place of execution. Already does the executioner hold the sword, prepared to strike; all will soon be over, the ungrateful man must die and suffer the just punishment of his crime. But on a sudden the shout of a strong voice is heard, ‘*Pardon, pardon from the king!*’ The criminal hardly dares believe his own ears, his heart is over-filled with joy. Presently the envoy of the king has come to him: ‘The

king, my master,' says he to him, 'has a good, tender heart; he grants you your pardon, but you must confess your crime and all its circumstances to one of his ministers. This is the only condition which he requires; choose now between immediate death and this mode of salvation.' 'Ah, quickly show me this minister,' exclaims the criminal, full of joy; 'I am ready to tell all; I only fear that the king will retract his promise.' 'No,' says the envoy, 'my master is good; and, as a pledge of his clemency, he permits you to select amongst twelve of his ministers the one who will inspire you with greater confidence; moreover, he has enjoined on this minister the strictest secrecy about the confession you will make to him, under the penalty of being himself put to death on the scaffold.' Who can tell of the increased joy of the criminal, of the blessings sent forth by the crowd on the monarch?"

Do not the most of men recognize themselves in this criminal, and in this merciful king, do they not see our God? We, alas, honored by His special protection and loaded with His blessings, have dared to revolt against the Lord. He has laid hold on us in His justice. We have been convicted; sen-

tenced; condemned; our punishment is already prepared. But a voice, the voice of mercy, has been raised in our behalf. The Lord forgives us; he only requires one condition, that we shall confess our sins to one of his ministers, and he allows us to make our choice, not among twelve, but among a great many. An impenetrable veil of secrecy will cover our avowals, and the priest who would violate the seal of confession would become more guilty than ourselves, and would suffer a more severe punishment. Let us, therefore, cease to blaspheme the Divine clemency, and to name hardness that which is really an excess of mercy and indulgence.¹

Is it not very painful and humiliating to go and kneel to a priest? We read in the history of the establishment of the Christian religion in China and Japan, that the inhabitants of those countries, far from looking upon confession as something painful and humiliating, were seized with admiration when they heard the missionaries speak to them about confession and the virtue it has to reconcile sinners with God.²

The preaching of the same doctrine made

¹ Sermons of *Father Guyon*.

² *Histoire et Description de Japon*, par *Charlevoix*.

such impression on the Paraguayans that they could not but exclaim in their joy, "Is it possible, then, that the Great Spirit is so good and merciful?"

On the first of September, 1817, Don Garcias V., king of Congo, sent an autograph letter to the superior of the missionaries of St. Paul of Loanda. In that letter, which bears the impress of a candid, pious soul, he tells of the universal sorrow caused by the privation of religious privileges. The nobles, the princes, and himself particularly, lament because they cannot make their confession and receive the sacraments; he therefore begs of the superior of the mission to come, or to send him speedily some spiritual Fathers, for *he wishes to confess* and procure for his people the blessings of the pastoral ministration.¹

Some time ago² I had the pleasure of several conversations with the venerable Doctor Bruté, bishop of Vincennes. There are in his diocese about 25,000 Indians, and among them conversions to the faith are of frequent occurrence. I asked him how they felt about the doctrine of confession. "They like it very much," he answered; "they

¹ *Histoire des Rois.*

² In the month of Nov., 1835.

practise it readily, and it many times happens that men employ women as interpreters."

On the eve of St. Francis Xavier's day, in 1835, there arrived at St. Louis an Indian, who came from the other side of the Rocky Mountains. He had been brought up in the mission of Saut St. Louis, Lower Canada, and had gone back among the Indians 18 years since, and had not forgotten his religion whilst living with the Flat Head Indians. He had started from the head waters of the Columbia river, with his two sons, intending to come to Canada and have them baptized; but as he learned that there were priests in St. Louis, he came hither, had his children baptized, *made his confession*, and started back to his country, after entreating that missionaries might be sent to his tribe.

Such are the feelings of uncultivated Indians with regard to confession. They consider it as one of the greatest gifts of the mercy of God, and in this they are right, guided by their simple, candid minds, and are not blinded by pride. Their sentiment, I must confess, has much more weight with me than all the sayings of many bad Christians, led astray by their passions, who cease

not to repeat, “Is it not very painful and humiliating to go and kneel to a priest?”

Why should we consider confession as an act of humiliation? Whilst in the confessional, the priest to whom I confess my sins is not an ordinary man, he is the minister of God almighty; he is Christ’s delegate and mandatory; and to Jesus Christ Himself I address myself in the person of His representative. “When I confess my sins,” says an author,¹ “it is not to the priest alone that I make my confession, but to God almighty, whose clemency and mercy I implore; I avow my guilt to the Saviour’s holy Mother, that virgin ever spotless and pure, who never needed pardon for herself, and entreats it for me; to Michael, the Archangel, who defeated the rebellious prince and dragged him down from heaven into the eternal abyss; to John the Baptist, the preacher of penance; to blessed Peter, to whom were confided the keys of the kingdom of heaven; to Paul, who by a miracle was converted, and associated with the head of the Church; I confess to all the saints, who reign in glory and enjoy the happiness of God Himself, yet who never fail to rejoice when a sinner does penance

¹ *Memoirs de M. de Belval.*

It is therefore God, thrice holy, and the heavenly army which surrounds His throne, that I take for the witnesses of my sincerity and sorrow; I ascend in spirit to the very midst of that heavenly court, which looks at me with attentive eye; I forget the *man* who listens to me; I only remember Him who has seen and heard all, and already knoweth all that is in my heart; I feel insensible to the shame of painful avowals, and cheerfully comply with an action ennobled by religion, and completely justified by my very reason.—My reason, indeed, tells me that God could annex the remission of sin to the confession of it; faith teaches me that He has done so, and that to a sacred minister, who represents Him, He has given power to grant absolution; how, therefore, can it be a humiliation to confess to a man of this character?

CHAPTER XI.

Secret or Seal of Confession.

Laws of the Church. Father Kohlman of New York. It is unheard of that the seal of confession was ever violated. Apostate or insane priests. Martyrs to the secret of the confessional.

WILL not the priest reveal what he hears in confession? Will not the avowals of the penitent produce a bad impression on his mind? Such difficulties, no doubt, have presented themselves to the mind of the reader. In answer we shall briefly expose the doctrine of the Catholic Church concerning the secret of confession. In the language of the Church this secret is also called seal, *the seal of confession*, to signify that whatever is known through this channel is, as it were, placed under seal.

In the religious ceremonies of Bacchus, Venus, and Adonis, confession was made, as we stated above, and the priests who heard

confessions wore a key suspended from their shoulder, as a symbol of the secret they were expected to keep. History does not say how violators of the secret were punished among the pagans. As to the Catholic Church, it forbids the confessor to declare sins heard in confession to any one, directly or indirectly, upon any account whatsoever, under pain of deposition and perpetual imprisonment in a monastery.¹ This law is general and admits of no exception.

In no case whatever is the confessor allowed to speak. Not even the slightest fault known to him by confession has he a right to reveal, though he were by his silence to risk his honor and reputation, or if he were threatened with tortures, or death itself. All this is a consequence of what we have stated before: the priest holds the place of Christ; it is not to men that we confess, but to God, in the person of His delegates, and therefore the priest must not, as man, think on or remember what was confided to him in the tribunal of penance. He must be as silent about such sins, as if they had not been confided to him. He must in regard to this matter imitate the example of God,

¹ Fourth Council of Lateran.

whom he represents. "But," says St. John Climachus, "it is unheard of that God ever declared sins told in confession; otherwise, men would be deterred from so holy and wholesome a practice, and there would remain no remedy for the maladies of our souls. The confessor knows nothing as man: therefore he can answer, even with an oath, the judge who questions him, that he has no knowledge of the crime of an accused person, if he knows it only through the confessional." This is the doctrine of all theologians on this subject. "A man," says St. Thomas, "cannot be summoned as a witness except as man, he can, therefore, declare with a free conscience that he knows nothing of the matter, when he knows it only as God." "If a judge," says Estius on this subject, "were so reckless as to ask a priest if a person had confessed to him such a crime, the priest should plainly reply that the law of God forbids him to answer so sacrilegious a question."¹

It is in accordance with these principles that the Catholic clergy have always acted. In the year 1813 the Rev. Dr. Kohlman, a Catholic priest in the city of New York, was,

¹ *Estius*, in lib. iv.

by the sacrament of penance, an instrument of restoring stolen property to its owner. Certain persons had been previously arrested on suspicion, and a prosecution instituted against them, and Dr. Kohlman, after restoring the stolen property to its owner, was summoned to give in evidence, and required to disclose the person or persons from whom he had received it. He in a most respectful manner stated to the court, that, not having any knowledge of the theft by any natural or common way of information, it being solely acquired by sacramental confession, it was his duty to suffer any punishment, even death itself, rather than divulge the knowledge acquired in this way. The court, over which presided the Hon. De Witt Clinton, unanimously decided in his favor, and, there being no evidence against the defendants, they were acquitted. But if the welfare of society at large demanded it, if a conspiracy had been formed against the head of the state, could not a confessor declare the secret of confession? The confessor knows nothing as man; in no case, therefore, is he permitted to speak. The most trifling disclosure, either direct or indirect, is contrary to the very essence of confession.

"The seal of confession is of divine right; it rests on the institution of the sacrament of penance, on the obligation laid upon us to confess our sins; hence no power can dispense from the law, *not even in the case of danger for the commonweal*," says a learned writer.¹ The same writer remarks that the admission of a contrary principle would be of no advantage to rulers: for what criminal would accuse himself of having conspired against the State, if the priest were permitted to make it known.

Henry IV., king of France, being one day in the company of the Duke of Bouillon, sent for Father Cotton, to ask him what he thought of a question much debated in those days, viz., if there was anything to prevent a confessor to give secret information to a king about a conspiracy against his royal person, when this knowledge came through the confessional?

"All is over with the sacrament of penance," said the Father, "if the slightest disclosure of confession is admitted; the life and welfare of kings are indeed the most precious blessing of a state; but this blessing is of the purely natural order, consequently much

¹ *De Réal.*

inferior to the worship and honor due to almighty God. . . . A criminal who would intend to commit such a crime would not think of going to the priest, if he feared disclosure; but if it be well known that full reliance may be placed on the silence of the priests, those criminals may have recourse to their ministry, and thus be induced by their exhortations and entreaties not to accomplish their sacrilegious designs.

We have stated the doctrine of the Catholic Church concerning the secret of the confessional, let us now see how that sacred law has been kept.

It is written in the life of St. Ambrosius, which was written by Paulinus, one of his deacons, that the holy prelate, when hearing confessions, would shed many tears, and would thereby move his penitents to weep with him, but of all that was said to him he spoke nothing at all, except to almighty God, whose mercy he implored in behalf of repenting sinners. Such, also, has been, since the days of St. Ambrosius, the conduct of the priests employed in hearing confessions. In the confessional they have learned all; the consciences of penitents have been laid open to them; but outside of the confes-

sional they have ignored what they had heard, and no human power has been able to force them to break the laws of the seal of confession. Magistrates have summoned them to speak, but they remained silent, and the magistrates could not but admire their firmness and courage. Threats and promises have been used to overcome their constancy ; but they cared not for either ; they betrayed not the secret ; and, like St. Ambrosius, to God alone did they speak of what had been confided to them.

Here is, however, something more worthy of admiration. It has sometimes happened that priests became insane, and would talk irrationally on every subject except the subject of confession. Were they questioned about confession, on that very moment their reason seemed to return to them, and they would rebuke their profane interrogators. I will name amongst others Rev. M. Houlbert who, before our (French) Revolution, discharged sacerdotal duties at Sablé. He was irreproachable in his morals, zealous in performing his duty, and as he refused to take the oath of fidelity to the civil constitution of the clergy, he was sent to prison as a malefactor ; and here the fear

of death, which threatened him every day, made such an impression on his mind, that after some time he became insane. He was removed to the *Le Mans* hospital, where he died, in 1830. Rev. M. Houlbert was habitually silent, by spells, however, he would talk very fast, but there was no connection or sense in anything he said. One day young men came to visit him, and after talking on different subjects they came to that of confession. "There was a time when you heard confessions: please, Reverend sir, tell us something." Instantly the priest was seized with madness. "You are wicked, scandalous men;" he exclaimed, "you question me on the seal of confession; these things are never spoken of, do, please, retire;"¹ and he made them go out of his cell. On another occasion a lady, one of his old penitents, came to visit him. "Do you not know me?" she said; "there was a time when I used to go to confession to you." "Unfortunate creature," he exclaimed again, "walk out of here; you speak to me of confession? never can such things be spoken of." We were told by a clergyman who witnessed this scene, that no man of sound mind could

¹ Souvenirs de la *Marquise de Créquy*.

have spoken with more sense and energy.

We all know of the great scandals which afflicted the Church of France at the close of the eighteenth century; some priests were seen, regardless of their sacred oaths, to renounce the priesthood and deny their faith, in order to lead dissolute lives, or contract sacrilegious marriages; yet never was it heard that one of them revealed a secret heard in confession. "It is certainly remarkable, we should say, perhaps, wonderful," says a writer, "that among so many crimes of the French Revolution it was never heard that any apostate priest violated in any way the seal of the sacrament of penance. One of these, the unfortunate Bénardière, who had been parish priest of Evron, was but too well known amongst us. After giving up his sacred office during the Revolution, he gave way to the most shameful excesses. He would frequently be found in a state of complete drunkenness; he made his companions of the most degraded, intemperate men in the country; his language was habitually impious and obscene; and his tongue was continually soiled with horrible blasphemies.... Yet, did they attempt to speak to him of confession, he kept a dead silence. Being once in a

state of ebriety, his boon companions importuned him that he might tell them something of what he had heard in confession when he was a priest,—not a word could they get of him. Though he could scarcely stand, he started away quite angry, stammering, as he went, ‘These things must not be spoken of.’ This fact is well known to all the people of Evron.—Is there not in this something miraculous?—I could name another one, who married a woman in spite of his sacred vows; all agree to-day that his disposition is kind, that he lives in peace with his unfortunate consort. Once, however, this harmony was disturbed; cries of indignation were heard in the house; severe blows were given; and what was the reason of that fit of anger? The woman had dared to ask the fallen priest some questions relative to confession. Have we not, then, a right to exclaim, “The finger of God is here”?¹ Can we deny that there is a Providence which watches over the seal of confession, and will not permit it to be broken? What more can be desired to inspire us with an entire and perfect confidence? We have not said all, how-

¹ Exod. viii. 19.

ever, and what we will now relate will be found equally striking.

History, so far, mentions only two priests who have had to choose between death and the revealing of confessions. Well, both did choose to die.—To save them only one word was needed,—that word they would not utter, and their blood has been spilled by tyrants. The first of these martyrs was St. John Nepomucene, chaplain to the emperor Wenceslaus. He had undoubtedly been called by Providence to that situation, that the world might know by his striking example how almighty God strengthens the ministers of sacramental penance against all threats or seductions.

On account of his piety, he had been chosen by the empress Johanna as the director of her conscience, and she very soon made rapid progress in virtue. Her piety did but irritate the violent temper of Wenceslaus. He became so jealous of his royal consort, that all her actions, even the most holy, were to him an occasion of fear and suspicion. To such a degree was he blinded by his passion, that he, very strange to say, resolved to compel the priest to tell him whatever the empress had declared to him in confession.

He thereupon sent for the priest, addressed to him at first some indirect questions, and then made known what he desired of him. John was horrified, yet respectfully represented to him how contrary to reason and religion his project was. "I cannot speak," said he, "I know not anything." The emperor concealed his anger and remained silent. A few days after he again remanded the holy priest; flatteries, promises, and threats were used to make him reveal the confession of the empress, but all was useless. Cruel torments employed against him did not shake his firmness. Finally, he was threatened with death. "You can put me to death," said John Nepomucene; "but you cannot force me to speak." Whereupon the emperor ordered to bind his hands and feet and throw him down in the Moldaw, where the confessor perished. This event took place on May 16, 1383. His body was brought out by some pious persons, and placed in a tomb, before which many miracles were performed. When the tomb was opened, April 14, 1719, his tongue was found entire, as if he had just expired, and it is now preserved with great respect in the Cathedral of Prague.

John Sarcander, pastor of Holleschow, diocese of Olmutz, in 1620, followed the example of John Nepomucene. He was the first pastor of that parish after the expulsion of the Picards, who had occupied it for eighty years. For this he was hated by the enemies of the Catholic Church, and their hatred increased in proportion to his zeal for the conversion of heretics and the rights of the Church. On this account, and chiefly *because of his constancy in not disclosing the seal of the confessional*, when he had fallen into the hands of the persecutors, during the Bohemian war,¹ he was subjected to frightful tortures, which ended in his death. The cause of the Beatification of John Sarcander was introduced at Rome about the year 1836.

To these two martyrs of the seal of the confessional we might join Rev. Father Garnet, an English Jesuit, commonly named by Protestants the *great Jesuit*. In the year 1606, Father Garnet was arrested and condemned to be hung for not revealing an act disclosed to him under the seal of confession. Nothing could bring him to speak, and he walked with firmness and courage to the scaffold.

¹ In the year 1620.

Martyrdom, as we see, has been suffered for the secret of confession. Many martyrs have shed their blood for the defence of Catholic doctrines as a body, and some particular doctrines have had their martyrs, yet there are many other dogmas which have not been defended in this manner. "It seems thereby," says Lenglet Dufreznoy, "that almighty God intended to place the secret of confession among the chief truths of religion."

We have now laid down the doctrine of the Church concerning the secret of confession; we have shown how that secret has been kept; let us, therefore, draw the inference, that, whatever may be the number or enormity of the crimes of poor sinners, they may rely with full confidence on the discretion of their Father confessor.

We will end our work by citing the admirable exhortations of St. John Chrysostom: "How shall we be deemed worthy of pardon, if we be unwilling to confess our sins to Him who thoroughly knows all our actions? Does He wish to be informed of them as if He were ignorant? He that knows all things before they are done, requires us to confess, not because He is

ignorant, but because He wishes us to become sensible of the greatness of our sins, by confessing them, and to show our gratitude to Him for granting us a means of obtaining forgiveness. Are riches to be expended for this purpose? Must a long journey be undertaken? Does this medicine of the soul cause pain and torture? The remedy is at hand, free of expense, and attended with no excruciating pain. The Lord applies remedies to our wounds, in proportion to the diligence and earnestness of the applicants. Let, then, whosoever wishes to recover his health and cure the ulcers of his soul, approach the physician with penitent heart, and lay aside all worldly cares; let him shed bitter tears; let him use great diligence, and trust to the skill of the physician, and he will regain his health. Thou perceivest the glory of the physician, whose love far exceeds that of the most affectionate parents. Does he require of us anything painful and difficult? He demands contrition of heart, compunction of mind, confession of our misfortune, and constant efforts to amend; and He not only cures our wounds, and cleanses us from sin, but even makes him just who was weighed down by the

burden of manifold transgressions. O great mercy! O excellent bounty! The sinner, on confessing his sins and seeking pardon, receives the assurance of it, and suddenly becomes just.¹

As to the qualities of confession, the necessity of sorrow for sins, and of a firm purpose of amendment, etc., we remit the candid readers to Catholic manuals or prayer-books. By frankly complying with the injunction of Christ they will find that peace of mind which He brought to His disciples when He established the sacrament of penance—“Peace be to you!—whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them.”

¹ *St. John Chrys.*, hom. xx. in. c. Gen. iv.

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